Points of connection and difference

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As our field evolves, new topics are brought into view and innovative approaches to this subject matter emerge. Challenges to established understandings surface and traditional methodologies are questioned. The essays in this issue engage with understudied dimensions of Latino Studies from new vantage points. They highlight the ways in which Cuban American and Central American cultural artists are enriching the Latino literary and cultural arts canon and map out a more complex picture of the Latino immigration story through their focus on aspects of migration that are underrepresented in the academic discourse.

Two essays in this issue continue the work of expanding the scope of *Latinidades* within cultural studies. Karen Christian draws attention to the marginalization of Cuban American literature within *Latin@* literary studies. She argues that by reducing Cuban American literature to a few well-trodden stereotypes (that it exclusively centers an elite, conservative, and exile experience) many scholars misrepresent the broad spectrum and diversity of Cuban American literary contributions. Christian encourages scholarship that is responsive to the richness and complexity of the literature and its multiple intersections with other Latino literatures. One strand of Cuban American literature that she believes deserves more attention, in Cuban American and other Latino literatures, is the concept of post memory which refers to the idea that historical trauma (i.e. slavery, dictatorships, exile, and migration) is passed on from generation to generation. This is certainly a recurring motif in the varied body of transnational and diasporic Latino literatures.

Violence and its aftermath are other tropes common to Latino cultural studies given the Americas' long history of colonization and imperialism and the nuances of the Central American chapter of this tragic story are finally being considered. Marisel Moreno brings us two powerful examples of the “art of witness” with her

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exploration of the writings of William Archila, a Salvadoran poet who fled to the US during the civil war, and Honduran artist Alma Leiva who left her country to escape poverty and violence. As Moreno demonstrates, Archila's book, *The Art of Exile*, and Leiva's installation-photography series, *Celdas*, evoke the trauma and violence of Central American civil wars and the resultant situation of poverty, crime, and drug cartels that have wrecked their native lands in the post war era. Both members of the 1.5 generation, these Central American cultural workers insist on bearing witness to the long-term effects of war and the resulting destabilization that manifests in myriad forms decades later. They give voice to the scores of victims and their families whose situations are otherwise ignored or sensationalized in mainstream culture.

Also continually sensationalized in the political discourse is the tired stereotype that dangerous undocumented immigrants are "swarming" our borders. This lie greatly contributed to the election of the current president despite the reality that since the 2007–2008 recession more Mexican immigrants are crossing the border to *leave* the US than are crossing the border to enter.¹ Sandra V. Navarro considers how cinema contributes to creating the climate that has brought us to our current state of paranoia. She examines representations of Latino characters in two recent Hollywood films, *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* and *No Country for Old Men*. Navarro argues that through their depiction of ambiguous and mostly silent Latino characters (one of whom is dead throughout most of the film and the other who is a nefarious and enigmatic criminal of few words) these border films capture US culture's anxieties and fears about undocumented immigrants. As in other border films, the central Latino characters in these movies are framed as unknowable and inassimilable immigrants who provoke societal anxieties about dangerous borderlands and national security.

The other two articles in this issue focus on immigrant adaptation and social mobility from very different perspectives. One presents the obstacles encountered by high-skilled immigrants and the other highlights the challenges faced by working class migrants in new destinations. Understandably, much of the discourse on Latino immigration centers on the plight of those who face the greatest obstacles, undocumented immigrants. However, Lina Rincon brings into view a group that is rarely discussed: those in the US on temporary work visas. She interviews high-skilled Colombian engineers on H1B visas and documents how they endure years of uncertainty about their status as well as exploitative work conditions as they wait, sometimes for a decade, for their cases to wind through the system. She shows how our broken immigration system impacts people at all levels. While not equating the situation of undocumented immigrants with those of a middle-class, college educated population, Rincon underscores how US immigration law negatively impacts the integration experiences of another set of Latino/a migrants about whom we rarely hear.

In another article that considers the incorporation of Latino migrants in an understudied context, Jacqueline Villarrubia-Mendoza explores how working class, Mexican migrants are economically integrated into a new immigrant destination

¹ <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/04/23/net-migration-from-mexico-falls-to-zero-and-perhaps-less/>.

suffering from unemployment and poverty. Immigrants, many of them undocumented, are drawn to low-skilled jobs in Newburgh, New York because of social networks as well as the desire to escape virulent anti-immigrant sentiment in more established immigrant communities. Especially interesting is the impact Latino workers have on other low-skilled workers, particularly African Americans, in a context where labor opportunities are scarce. This study which contributes to research on Black and Brown cooperation and competition, presents a mixed picture. The increased population of immigrants seems to have led to new opportunities for African Americans in the health industry, while they have concurrently lost ground in some low-skill industries where employers now prefer Latinos since they are seen to be a more compliant and thus a more exploitable work force.

The contributions in this issue affirm our commitment to expanding the parameters and perspectives on Latino studies. We also offer a *Reflexiones Pedagógicas* essay on a creative initiative that promises to strengthen the retention rates of Spanish-dominant students in college and an interview with Peruvian American director, Alex Rivera whose cutting-edge films and music videos deserve much more attention. Finally, you will be treated to the rich selection of book reviews on recent Latino scholarship. Enjoy!