

Dossier

Global Latinidades: Toward a Transhemispheric
Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x Studies

Introduction

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The geospatial shift in the locus of enunciation that began with the sixteenth-century contact between Europe and the Americas always already positions Latina/o/x peoples as central to a global enterprise. While the study of Latina/o/x populations always elicits diverse, complex, and vexing conceptual challenges, this global legacy necessarily renders our knowledge about *Latinidades* historically and radically incomplete. What does it mean, then, to rethink *Latinidades* globally and contend with the foundational, yet incomplete, concepts and paradigms of Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x studies?

In the new millennium, the field of Chicana/o/x studies continues to evolve; its paradigms, enunciations, and epistemologies are continuously intersecting as well as constituting (and being constituted by) other fields. Shifting into new areas of inquiry in order to dismantle entrenched identitarian stases, the field of Chicana/o/x studies must continue to engage with Central American studies by exploring its diversity in the isthmus and beyond, and with Afro-Latina/o/x studies by critically examining its histories, racial formations, and relationships with other groups. Moving forward, Chicana/o/x studies must also give increased attention to Latinx Muslims, Latinx Asians, and migratory processes and trajectories of Indigenous groups across the Americas, to name only a few possibilities for the relational scholarship that needs to be achieved. The growing and increasingly more complex in-group diversity has only compounded the need for a globalized approach to Chicana/o/x studies research that builds on but also increases the conventional focus on the US-Mexico borderlands and on the East Coast and midwestern United States, along with intersecting transnational flows within these familiar parameters and regions. This growing dispersion of paradigms and populations serves as a further critique

of José Limón's "critical regionalism" and its order of prioritization of the nation-state over the global (Limón 2008, 167).

For the reasons posed by such questioning, this dossier enjoins ongoing dialogues about the continual expansion and transformation of Chicana/o/x studies, particularly regarding the theories, approaches, and subjects that animate the field. This simultaneously requires particular attention to transhemispheric margins and a particular vigilance against reification. As the contributions in this issue demonstrate, global frameworks invite us to dialogue, to take another look—"looking awry," in José David Saldívar's words (2011, 57)—at what we thought we knew. Building upon Saldívar's maneuver, yet without looking back at the United States as a site of mediation, this dossier operates even outside the Americas as an anchorage. Foreshadowing the emergence of the "X," Sandra Soto proposes a "demastery" of knowledge that enables us to undo orthodoxies and tautological

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methodologies: “queerperformative ‘Chican@’ signals a conscientious departure from certainty, mastery, and wholeness, while still announcing a politicized collectivity” (2010, 2). Extending this radical skepticism into a spatiotemporality, this looking inward and outward from multiple sites throughout the world portends the mechanism that can lead us toward new suspicions of concretized epistemologies and ontologies. Indeed, a global and transhemispheric lens extends and continuously shifts our perspective to see beyond the persistent a priori inflections of regional, country-specific, or nationalist interpretive analyses.

Looking at places, spaces, and expressions that are not necessarily marked as Latina/o/x, this dossier is interested in the contradictory aspects of globalization that involve unexpected or underexamined Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x syntheses. Taken together, these essays explore variously globalized Latina/o/x subjects, unexpected locations, and the continual spatial relocations that demand attention through new interpretive lenses. Moreover, we invite theorizing about new subject formations—and ontologies—along with the unruly epistemologies that come from the myriad new and unexpected Latina/o/x dislocations throughout the world. Our attempt to extend this inquiry invites explorations of the messiness of the proto-, the supra-, and the post- across Latina/o/x practices and populations—that is to say, a Global Latinidades, a new Latina/o/x spatial studies appropriate to variable origins, global processes, and mobilities.

The essays in “Global Latinidades” compel us to question existing notions and limitations of fundamental categories in new political and discursive contexts. This dossier offers scholarly interventions in two sections: the first, “Globalizations: Decentering, Expanding, and Reconceptualizing Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x Studies”; and the second, “Mediations: The Symbolic and Political Economy of Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x Performance.” The contributors to this dossier move beyond the familiar emphases on regional studies, on the one hand, and transnational flows, on the other, that still largely privilege the United States. In fact, they examine new and transhemispheric contact zones, transculturations, and transversal syntheses that resituate *Latinidad* as global. For example, the essays by Claudia Milian, Roberto D. Hernández, and Michael A. Parra examine how these categories materialize in the spatial ontologies of a supra-*América*. Postulating from spaces like Spain, Aotearoa, Germany, Paris, and Japan, this dossier occupies the interstitial spaces and intellectual breaks and continuities in the fields of Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x, and Latin American studies. To be sure, these

fields and loci are contested, not interchangeable, and are often deployed in multiple and unpredictable ways.

The first section comprises three essays that alternately engage Latina/o/x globalizations and world making. In the opening article, “What Has Brown Done for Me Lately? The (Im)possibilities of Recuperating Brownness after 9/11,” Roberto Macias Jr. contends with the construction of a global brownness after 9/11 that ultimately failed to cement new affiliations across nationalities and ethnicities on a global scale. The vexing challenge posed by this experiment ultimately highlights the necessity of grappling with brownness as a category of relationality. The second essay, “LatinX Spain + Hispanidad,” by Claudia Milian, provides a thorough engagement of new trajectories of the “X” suffix through case studies of Latina/o/x populations in Spain. In remapping and piecing together a LatinXness, Milian focuses on contemporary Spanish politics and public discourses, thereby resituating the field’s locus of enunciation far outside familiar epistemological and ontological spaces. Closing this section, “Xicano ‘World’ Traveling and World Making: Aotearoa Meets Aztlán,” by Roberto D. Hernández, offers a participant-observer meditation on the counterepistemological project of the decolonial turn and new geographies of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies. Via dialogues in the Maori South Pacific, Hernández is instrumental in the search for a comprehensive method to mark pathways for negotiating, and negating to the degree possible, the colonial telos and cartographies.

The three essays in the second section explore case studies of global Latinidades. This involves complex transculturations and transversalisms extending through and far beyond Latina/o/x relations with the United States. The section opens with “On Becoming Chicano in Europe: John Rechy’s Immanently Queer Latino Soldado Razo Flâneur in Paris, 1950–52,” in which Michael A. Parra turns to the unmined memoir of gay Chicano author John Rechy. Parra examines how passing becomes a methodology that allows Rechy to radically imagine and embody a life beyond the material and figural closet. The second essay, by Amy Sara Carroll, “the-Mex-is: Guillermo del Toro’s Silver Angel versus *The Strain* (of the Political Economy of Vampirism),” is a mixed-genre critical creative theorizing of cultural politics, temporalities, camp sensibilities, and the “Greater-Mexican-becoming-global-Latinx.” Carroll scrambles “methexis” into a particularity of “the-Mex-is,” signaling a transmutation in a theatrical “group sharing” toward a cognitive remapping with kinship diagramming. The dossier closes with José G. Anguiano’s “Rolas de Nipón: Listening for

the Chicana/x-Japanese Musical Bridges in the Documentary *Our Man in Tokyo*,” which develops a unique and interconnected transversal prism, refracting Chicana/x culture across the Pacific and materializing in Japanese localities. Particularly, Anguiano engages a global media landscape in the construction and reconstruction of supra-Chicana/o/x culture in Latin Asian contexts.

Taken together, these essays directly interrogate the meanings of the global that have always been a feature of Latinidades by placing Chicana/o/x paradigms in dialogue with Latina/o/x and Latin American studies. This special dossier of *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* signals the necessity for further research. We thus invite readers to further explore yet other iterations of Global Latinidades as we continue to expand the dialogues toward the next syntheses of the pasts, presents, and futures of supra-Latina/o/x studies.

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“What Has Brown Done for Me Lately?”

The (Im)possibilities of Recuperating Brownness after 9/11

Roberto Macias Jr.

To concern oneself with the founding concepts of the entire history of philosophy, to deconstitute them, is not to undertake the work of the philologist or of the classic historian of philosophy. Despite appearances, it is probably the most daring way of making the beginnings of a step outside of philosophy.

—Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”

Linking the notion of friendship to the history of South Asian migration in the United States, Punjabi American rapper Heems (Himanshu Suri)—formerly of the hip-hop group Das Racist, which also included Victor Vazquez (Kool A.D.), of Afro-Cuban and Italian descent—cryptically intones in his stream-of-consciousness lyrical style, “Friend, my friend, you don’t call me, ‘my friend!’ / I call you, ‘my friend,’ my friend” (Heems 2012). These paradoxical lines are then immediately followed by allusions to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the controversial New York Police Department policy that once forbade Sikh police officers from wearing full turbans. Evoking both the paradoxical address attributed to Aristotle, “O my friends, there is no friend,” as well as the racist caricature of the servile South Asian merchant (for example, *The Simpsons’* Apu), Heems’s tone is accusatory and combative in addressing the audience, presumably, as friend.¹ Friendship thus operates here as a means of sustaining distance and enmity rather than denoting intimacy and affection, in part highlighting, in the faux quaintness that even late capitalism is capable of

assuming, the artificial but seemingly necessary performance of intimate relationality between merchant and consumer.² And yet, the racial specificity of the speaker—who in the same song above refers to his own “hellish views of life as a Telegu,” an ethnolinguistic group located in northern India—compels us to consider the particularity of the relationship between friendship and race. It is specifically the brown subject after all, figured here as a perpetual foreigner, who insists upon sustaining antagonism via friendship, rejecting our hospitality (*xenia*) as audience.³

Years prior to Heems’s antinomic depiction of friendship, Das Racist (2008–12) had attempted to playfully retheorize and perform a post-9/11 experience of brown identity across ethnicities and nationalities, gesturing in a *jouissance* of brownness toward new possibilities of affiliation. Albeit prefacing, somewhat critically after the fact, that “in Das Racist we were kind of hiding behind humor,” Heems later recounted in an interview on National Public Radio’s *Morning Edition* that Das Racist was about “unity between Victor [Vazquez] as a Latino and me as a South Asian, and this idea of brown” (NPR Staff 2015). Ultimately, despite the originality of their jovial yet biting performance of identity encompassed in “this idea of brown” (NPR Staff 2015), Das Racist disbanded at the height of their popularity and commercial success due to the members’ conflicting views on the direction of the group (Flanary 2012). However, as subsequent interviews would reveal, the dissolution reflected the fracturing of Suri and Vazquez’s formative friendship as well.⁴ Notably, then, from Suri’s work with Das Racist to his solo career, we can see a decisive shift, a disillusionment, in the conceptualization of brownness and its capacity for friendship. Yet, as a group often regarded as capturing the zeitgeist, Das Racist’s disintegration also reflects a larger cultural shift in the conceptualization of brownness in the contemporary moment.⁵

Thinking alongside recent efforts to contextualize and/or theorize brownness, I am interested in a fleeting moment of brown identity beyond the hemispheric that ultimately fails to deliver on its promise of concretizing global affiliations and ruptures:⁶ brownness’s February Revolution, its

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1848.⁷ This failure of friendship will provide the occasion to explore the methodological use of brownness as an analytic category in Latinx studies, especially in relation to recent efforts to further globalize the field. A central category in Western political philosophy, the notion of friendship (*philia* or the substantive, *philos*) has been shaped in great part by Aristotle's distinct formulation of the concept (Derrida 1997, 6). Generally, however, *philos* denotes a "voluntary bond of affection and good will, and normally excludes both close kin and more distant acquaintances, whether neighbors or fellow-citizens" (Konstan 1997, 53). In indicating a form of relationality fundamentally distinct from that of kin and immediate community, the notion of friendship—especially when, as discussed below, the term is reconceptualized in the wake of Aristotle—offers the field of Latinx studies a distinct yet underutilized paradigmatic lens for understanding how to situate brownness in an era that witnessed its proliferation, and thus (re)turn, into a globalized category. *Philos* will also allow us to ask whether relationalities that are not mediated through the state in the first instance are still possible today.

The notion of friendship in the Western tradition—which already in its origins, in the depiction of both Hippothales and Lysis as unrequited lovers, emerges as queerness—first appears in Plato's curious early dialogue *Lysis*. Largely regarded as a philosophical failure (Penner and Rowe 2005, xi), this peculiar text concludes not with a decisive definition of the operative term (that is, *friendship*) as its denouement but with Socrates's admission of ignorance after a series of circuitous digressions and recalibrations. The lesson is, tellingly, interrupted by Menexenus's and Lysis's attendants—who reveal, in summoning the boys home, "traces of their foreign accents" (2005, 223a)—but even so, Socrates is no closer to postulating the notion of friendship in positive terms. Thus, the dialogue closes with an unsatisfactory narrative and logical irresoluteness, with Socrates famously remarking, "We've not yet been able to discover what it is to be a friend" (Plato 2005, 223b). Operating in the space of utmost intimacy, in *Lysis* with *eros* and not strictly *philia*, friendship in this dialogue occupies a liminal zone, crossing over and then retreating in reticence, between the private and the public, between the social and the political. However, in the first instance friendship comprises here a negative relation to the *polis*, constituting the limit and thus conditioning the possibility of the political order itself. The scene of Plato's dialogue, after all, occurs at the Lyceum, located outside the city walls but still quite literally under its shadow: "Right under the wall" (Plato 2005, 203b).

By Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*, friendship—which, he makes explicit, human beings have a natural inclination toward and yet is only accessible

to men in particular (2014, 1237a)—has become standardized and divested of eroticism in an attempt to stabilize the unruly category. For example, distinguishing between three “species” of friendship based on virtue, utility, or pleasure (or pleasantness), Aristotle prioritizes virtuous friendship as the primary form on which the others are based. Significantly, political friendship is categorized as utility-based, suggesting that this form of relationality is not indicative of “the best men,” that is, the virtuous, whose conduct is above (and thus not determined by) the *polis* (1236b). In addition, political friendship is strictly premised upon a relationality of sameness (of identity) as opposed to difference (1239b); upon the “equality” of age, status, etc., of participants (1239a); and upon an agreement of political objectives that he equates to legality, even if left uncoded in practice (1242b). Thus, for Aristotle, political friendship equates to a hegemonic relationality that sustains the *polis*, rather than functioning, as in Plato, in potential productive tension with the state. In fact, if friendship as such, with its origins in the household, constitutes the foundation of justice and of the state (Aristotle 2014, 1242a), then political friendship itself functions as the very foundation of the *polis*. Yet, Aristotle reminds us repeatedly that friendship as an expression of a natural tendency toward affiliation precedes and exceeds the state: “Nor is a man a solitary animal but one with a special tendency to association with those to whom he is by nature akin. There would, then, be association and a kind of justice, even if there were no State” (1242a). Ultimately, then, rather than operating as the site of production of friendship, the *polis*, desiring a center, constitutes friendship in its absolute presence as its origin, its primal scene, which must be necessarily rehearsed and restaged ad infinitum.

Over two millennia after Plato, in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, distinct ethnic and national identities became increasingly conflated, in a kind of forced intimacy, into an amalgamation of a generalized brownness—a purely “social surface” (Fetta 2018, xviii), “one soul dwelling in two bodies” (Laertius 5.1.20), figured as a potential if not an actualized terrorist—in the Western political discourse surrounding the War on Terror.⁸ Distinct from earlier, more organic performances of brown identity, such as those that were premised upon notions of kinship and were constructed by Latinx groups struggling for self-determination in the United States, the iteration of brownness that emerges in this period is conceptualized in advance and from above as enemy—which, as in Carl Schmitt’s formulation of the concept of the political, is always and everywhere a public enemy (1932, 28). That is, from the simple act of defying

city loitering ordinances, to suicide bombings, to open displays of mutilated bodies (in the case of drug cartels), this emergent amalgamation of brownness is conceptualized in the first instance as a public terror capable of rending the very notion of the public itself. In this way, brownness becomes the exclusive purview of the public (imagination) in its status as consumable, and consumptive, public enemy and therefore must be “purified of all other dimensions—especially of everything opposed to the political or the public, beginning with the private” (Derrida 1997, 86–87). Thus, while US citizens overwhelmingly relinquished their expectations of privacy in the name of national security, for these domestic and international brown (typically male) subjects themselves, the effects of the War on Terror entailed not simply the policing but also an attempt to deny the very possibility of the private sphere, of intimacy as such. This is made glaringly explicit in the seeming necessity of the raids and capture of both Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera and Osama bin Mohammed bin Awad bin Laden in their respective bedrooms, surrounded by their family members.

And yet, the emergence of this reactionary discourse and juridical practice also unwittingly engendered—opening up, even if only fleetingly—new opportunities for reconceptualizing interethnic and international solidarities and affiliations on a global scale by reclaiming a brownness figured as public enemy and reconstituting it as friendship. Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, US writers and theorists had already begun to reconceptualize brownness beyond previous geographic parameters, seeking new affinities beyond nationalist paradigms, including the work of Cuban American theorist José Esteban Muñoz that came to compose his treatise *The Sense of Brown* (2020), the writings of Indian Marxist historian Vijay Prashad (2000), and the work of controversial Mexican American essayist Richard Rodriguez (2002). As Swati Rana (2015) points out, these works were responding at least in part to a “millennial discourse on race” in the United States that vacillated between postracial ideology, on the one hand, and racial hybridity, on the other. In various and even competing ways, then, these writers attempted to resist brown erasure—in the case of Rodriguez (2002), by homogenizing and universalizing brownness—which, in this country at the time, constituted the price of inclusion into the *polis*.⁹ However, the attacks on September 11 led to a renewed and unambiguous racial animus, as well as to the codification of anti-brownness into international law and policy, eliding the “millennial discourse on race” by making unimaginable even the remote possibility of a postracial society and the veneer of inclusion into the *polis*.

Paradoxically, however, the inherent racial animus structuring the War on Terror simultaneously extends brownness's geographic field of possibility as terrorism gets framed as a "global terror network," requiring an equally global military response. In addressing a joint session of Congress just nine days after the attacks, President George W. Bush (2001) stated, "This is not, however, just America's fight. And what is at stake is not just America's freedom. This is the world's fight." Furthermore, national security campaigns such as "If You See Something, Say Something"—which became a "global phenomenon," appearing in public security campaigns not only across the United States but also in Australia and Canada (Fernandez 2010)—led to brownness's ubiquity in the public consciousness. Suddenly hypervisible, brownness becomes further diffused; more than merely intercontinental, it is entirely unsettled, becoming *atopos*. Thus, in a perversion of Levinasian ethics, brownness is bequeathed a world—certainly a world of securitization, but the "world" in its geographic totality nonetheless—in the encounter and attempt to eradicate it from the world in its entirety.¹⁰

The story of Das Racist is intertwined with their critical reception, specifically the difficulty of situating them within a larger hip-hop tradition. Rising to internet notoriety with a song titled "Combination Pizza Hut and Taco Bell"—haphazardly recorded in one take with both Vazquez and Suri sharing a single microphone (ShineTravis 2010)—many critics initially labeled the group "joke rap" and dismissed them as a novelty act that would quickly fade into obscurity. Leaning into this ambiguity as their career progressed, Das Racist purposely became increasingly reticent to clear contextualization with each subsequent release. Their lyrics, for example, often contained a multitude of academic and literary references, including to postcolonial critics Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said; to literary figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, and Gary Soto; and to philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Albert Camus, among others. These references, however, were tempered by a style of lyricism that bordered on sloppiness, including the repetition of lyrics within and across songs, deliberately singing off-key, free association, and intentionally unsophisticated rhymes. Here the more immediate point of reference in the history of hip-hop includes a subgenre exemplified by pioneering MC "the Rappin' Duke" (Shawn Brown) and labeled "parody rap." However, what effectively distinguished Das Racist from "parody rap" was the way that Suri and Vazquez transitioned between insightful social critique and frivolity. Indeed, they seemed intent on undermining the seriousness of their message with parody and their levity with biting critique, in the

process obfuscating their true intentions as artists. This ambiguity is made explicit in the chorus to “hahahaha jk?” (2010): “We’re not joking; just joking. / We are joking; just joking, we’re not joking.” Ultimately, and even though Heems would later acknowledge that this lack of orientation caused the members of the group to “los[e] the sense of our own identities” (NPR Staff 2015), intentional obfuscation of convention became a part of the message itself.

The group’s lyrics nonetheless clearly reflect a reckoning with the conflation of brownness and the denial of (romantic) intimacy inherent in the post-9/11 construction of brownness as a public terror. In fact, with continual references to Lockheed Martin, Guantánamo Bay, drones, the Taliban, and even in the embarrassingly (yet deliberately) simplistic rhyme “Twin Towers, Colin Powers” (“Selena,” 2010), the War on Terror is a central frame of reference for Das Racist. In “Fashion Party” (2010), a song detailing the artificiality of the fashion industry and the group’s outsider status in it, one that exploited their popularity by fetishizing them as the latest trend, Heems depicts the War on Terror’s personal toll by satirizing his style of dress: “Yes, I’m tan, and Taliban chic. / Shorty said I look like a Taliban freak.” In contrasting the speaker’s satirical association with Shorty’s denigrating connotation—being misidentified by a love interest is a common refrain across their oeuvre—the end-rhyme in these lines brings into relief how brownness shifts from a fashionable and commodifiable identity (“Taliban chic”) to an increasingly exotic and dangerous performance, with “freak” connoting both sexual proclivity and grotesqueness. In addition, the chorus, vocalized in breathy tones by pop singer Caroline Polachek, emphasizes brownness’s inscrutability by calling into question the intentions of the MCs as suitors: “I can’t tell if you want to hit me or want to dance.” Overall, with a female vocalist who repeatedly claims to see the speakers at multiple trendy events, “Fashion Party” conveys a hypervisibility that attaches itself to brownness, an already suspicious courting of the unrecognizable that fetishizes in advance, thereby foreclosing intimacy. Similarly, “Shorty Said” (2010) depicts a lover who misidentifies the ethnicity of each MC or speaker. However, in stereotyping the MCs by dictating who or what they “look like,” the song also conveys brownness’s unlocalizability in either geographic or historical terms. Heems, a South Asian, recounts how Shorty has mistaken him for Mexican and Honduran American comedian Carlos Mencia (Ned Holness), the Mexican American television personality Mario Lopez, a bevy of contemporary and former Indian actors (including Aditya Pancholi,

John Abraham, and Kader Khan), and most egregiously as a Paleolithic era “Cro-Mag.” In addition to being mistaken for a “Cro-Mag,” the Afro-Cuban Kool A.D. recounts how Shorty has misidentified him as Venezuelan American artist Devendra Banhart, Mexican American musician Ritchie Valens (Richard Valenzuela), African American rappers “Egyptian Lover” (Gregory Broussard) and “Swizz Beatz” (Kasseem Daoud Dean), Osama bin Laden, and Barack Obama. Even in contesting Shorty’s associations, however, the speakers themselves are seemingly only capable of providing approximations of their own identities (however imprecise). In one verse, Heems challenges Shorty: “I said, ‘Take notice, and Ma, please focus. / I look like him [Carlos Mencia] but mixed with George Lopez.” In another verse, he counters that he looks like a Latino police officer, whom he fails to identify, on the television drama *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Notably, in both instances it is only indirectly, in similes and only by building upon Shorty’s own associations, that Heems can at best approximate, through substitutions, his own brown identity.

However, if the flattening of brownness after 9/11 forecloses intimacy, it simultaneously disrupts the possibility of constructing global brown affiliations premised upon kinship. The song “Puerto Rican Cousins” (2010) depicts how the speakers are often misidentified as kin although Vazquez and Suri are neither related nor of Puerto Rican descent. The chorus, riffing on Sister Sledge’s disco hit “We Are Family” (1979), a song about kinship as racial solidarity, satirizes how brownness across ethnicities and nationalities in the post-9/11 era can merely give the illusion of, and thus functions as a poor substitute for, kinship. Although both MCs play on their own tokenization throughout the song, Kool A.D.’s verses in particular highlight a paradoxical desire for individuality—figured here as difference and distinction in the speaker’s desire to “ride” on his own and to single-handedly save the world—and collectivity. However, these contradictions cannot be resolved in and through kinship, as signaled by Kool A.D.’s resignation to tokenization at the end of the song: “We alright, type man. / We get along (like Puerto Rican cousins).” Ultimately, through the notion of typecasting as a central motif, “Puerto Rican Cousins” links the insistence on kinship as a melancholic longing for a center in an era of utter dispersion and defamiliarization.

Instead, *Das Racist* offers the possibility of countering the construction of brownness as public enemy through a globalized brownness that is figured as friendship, not as a means to return to the city center but as a perpetual wandering or wondering. Both inside and outside of the *polis* simultaneously (as its object and objective) and premised upon difference rather than

sameness as well as upon agonism, *Das Racist* reconceptualizes normative (that is, Aristotelian) friendship as a radical form of public intimacy. Assuming surveillance in advance, and thus the interpellation of intimacy into the biopolitical order (Puar 2007, 164), *Das Racist* playfully tropes the decentering of brownness by further decentering it, abandoning the desire for locus and origins, that which brownness as kinship cannot achieve. Hence, even the examples that they provide of “brown[ing] everything” throughout their oeuvre are intentionally absurd. *Kool A.D.*, for instance, presents as a “new” version of brownness: “Brown Elvis, I can’t help it. / Brown Larry Bird on the ’97 Celtics. / All brown everything, better than you’ve ever seen. / Never have you ever seen anything like it” (“Who’s That? Brooown!” 2010). If the irony in these verses is that we have seen both the white Elvis and Larry Bird in the form of African American musicians and athletes in popular culture, there is a further irony in that globalized brownness can only ever function as a copy of a copy. This denaturalization of brownness as a category is both a way of contesting the flattening of brownness after 9/11, on the one hand, and brownness’s own inherent tendency toward universalization and totality (Guzmán 2017), on the other. Furthermore, directly addressing the audience, *Kool A.D.* outlines in “People Are Strange” (2010): “The only consistence is change, my friend. / Use your brain, my friend. It’s a game, friend.” Thus, play, as an insistence on absolute immanence and on unrecognizability, constitutes the foundation—that is, lack of foundation—on which brown relationality as friendship is premised, and in this way it refuses in advance to found a new center to the *polis* as a global order. In the end, the fundamental questions that *Das Racist* raises as a project—for instance, in “Who’s That? Brooown!”: “What can brown do for you? What has brown done for me lately?”—shift the discourse on brownness toward absolute relationality itself, that is, toward ethics.

However, this reconceptualization of brownness as friendship in the final instance was never enough. Brownness is, after all, a serious matter. As Heems recounts, “My community is Indian, Pakistani, Indo-Caribbean, Guyanese, Trinidadian—and when I was in *Das Racist* I was really removed from the community” (NPR Staff 2015). We are left, then, with having to contend with this failure of friendship in our own use of brownness as a category of relationality going forward because after the “event” of 9/11, as *Das Racist* reveals, brownness as such can never again be “axiomatic,” to borrow Rana’s phrasing (2015, 299). For Latina/o/x studies, the same challenge confronts us as we reexamine the operative terms that have inaugurated, anchored, and propelled the field to the current conjunctural moment.

Notes

1. For an in-depth discussion of the politics of South Asian representation in the United States, see the documentary *The Problem with Apu* (2017). Comedian Hari Kondabolu, who wrote and stars in the film, is the older sibling of the third member of Das Racist, Heems's childhood friend and the group's hype man, Dapwell (Ashok Kondabolu).

2. David Konstan points out that friendship in ancient Greek and Latin contexts has traditionally been read as comprising a purely instrumental relationship (1997, 2). However, Konstan outrightly rejects this reading of ancient friendship.

3. Often translated as “guest-friendship,” or simply as hospitality, *xenia* traditionally refers to friendship between foreigners (Konstan 1997, 6).

4. Significantly, this fracturing of their friendship was evident in many of their statements regarding the breakup. For example, before officially announcing their separation, Heems lamented in a profile: “We were better friends when we started. . . . We lived together, worked together and toured together. You need space after that, with anyone. I wish it didn’t take a toll on that side of things” (Vozick-Levinson 2012, 42). For his part, Kool A.D. commented to *Rolling Stone* that the members of the group remained “more or less friends” but simultaneously opined: “Like, why are we even going through the motions of another album that’s going to be a whole ‘nother year of having to hang out with each other?” (Flanary 2012). Finally, Dapwell told *Fader*, “In the beginning, it was just us. We’d all hang out all the time, we all lived in this apartment together. Not that we were super friends, but sort of, you know?” (Zeichner 2012).

5. In his review of Das Racist’s album *Relax* (2011), music critic Zachary Houle accuses the group of “zeitgeist baiting” (Houle 2011).

6. This includes the work of Hiram Perez (2005), Swati Rana (2015), Armando García (2015), Kumarini Silva (2016), Joshua Javier Guzmán (2017), Stephanie Fetta (2018), and José Esteban Muñoz (2020).

7. As A. J. P. Taylor writes of the failed revolution in Germany in 1848: “German history reached its turning-point and failed to turn. This was the fateful essence of 1848” ([1945] 2005, 71). This sentiment, the failed promise of radical political possibility, informs leftist readings of the Revolutions of 1848, haunting Karl Marx and the Marxist tradition.

8. Among US citizens, those targeted as terrorists have ranged from Latino youth in street gangs, in the case of Edgar Morales, to sixteen-year-old Yemeni American Abdulrahman Aal-Awlaki, the target of a drone strike in Yemen. However, as Ben V. Oluwín points out: “September 11 introduced not only a new enemy—the dark-skinned Muslim male—but a new way of understanding the old racial minority ‘menace to society’ who, historically, has been figured as a Black male and/or, with increasing frequency, a Latino male. Today, the two villains—the international and the domestic—have become indistinguishable” (2010, 3).

9. Armando García, for instance, points out: “Brownness stems from the experiences of minoritarian exile from official markers of citizenship where

Latinas/os register as citizen-subjects endowed with legal status but are nonetheless denied access to official political ontology” (2015, 103).

10. Emmanuel Levinas writes of worldhood and the Other: “The relationship with the Other is not produced outside of the world, but puts in question the world possessed. The relationship with the Other, transcendence, consists in speaking the world to the Other. . . . The analyses of language that tend to present it as one meaningful action among others fail to recognize this offering of the world, this offering of contents which answers to the face of the Other or which questions him, and first opens the perspective of the meaningful. . . . To see the face is to speak of the world. Transcendence is not an optics, but the first ethical gesture” (1969, 173–74, emphasis in original).

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LatinX Spain + Hispanidad

Claudia Milian

Two days after Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations were launched in the United States, another Hispanidad was heralded in Spain. On September 17, 2021, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, president of the conservative People's Party of the Community of Madrid, announced the global ascendancy of the Spanish language. She paved the way for her new continental project, the Office of Spanish (*Oficina del Español*). Premiering at the inaugural Hispanidad festival, the two-week program—capped by its polyphonic motto “All Accents Fit in Madrid” (*Todos los acentos caben en Madrid*)—offered about eighty events, including film screenings, concerts, conferences, and exhibitions.

Holding a post akin to that of a US state governor, Madrid's president took stock of the Spanish language—a living heritage spoken by “almost 600 million people” (*Comunidad de Madrid* 2021). “We're not making the most of this wealth of Spanish as we should be,” Ayuso averred. “No other living Western language” can boast “being universal. . . . The culture made in Spanish makes us a cultural powerhouse.” Pointing out the language's legacy in art, politics, intellectual thought, folklore, and literature, she touted its potential in the music industry, a global enterprise that has not staked a claim in the peninsula. Instead, profit-making cultural ventures trace their provenance to “places like Miami, something that happens with the largest producers of series, movies, or video games.” The Office of Spanish, located in *La Villa y Corte*, as Madrid is called, will outpace “the United States, the center of musical production in Spanish.” “Yes, we are ambitious,” Ayuso added—letting everyone know she meant business (*Comunidad de Madrid* 2021).

Madrid harbors “the diversity and richness of Spanish accents, from Spain's different regions and from Latin America,” she riffed. “Our plan counts on those who have been born here and the hundreds of thousands

who come from everywhere.” Madrid is poised to become the European capital of Spanish—tapping into “students from all over the world, alongside artists, producers, and distributors.” They would grow into a uniform production team networked with what Ayuso identified as Madrid’s “quality tourist” sector (Comunidad de Madrid 2021). The Office of Spanish doesn’t intend to attract Spanish native speakers as much as Spanish language learners, she clarified. If her initiative competed with someone, it would be with the other European capitals.

Ayuso’s capacious yet homogenized touchstone for a pop, wholesale, and triumphant Hispanidad couched in Europe proves, *prima facie*, spectacular. Her appointment of former actor Toni Cantó as the office’s director entrusted an industry insider with media innovations to traffic Madrid Central’s Hispanic market. Who are Madrid’s consumers of this municipal Hispanidad? And what is a “mainstream” European Hispanidad?

Ayuso didn’t reference US Latina/o/@/e/X culture. The Spanish/“Latin” canon that tourists stumble upon on the Hollywood Walk of Fame—Antonio Banderas, Penélope Cruz, Plácido Domingo, Julio Iglesias, Alejandro Sanz, and so on—was jettisoned. Rosalía—née Rosalía Vila Tobella—the Barcelona-born superstar who likely inspired Ayuso’s desiderata for a Madrid-based Hispanidad, was also erased. Since her debut album, *Los Ángeles* (2017), Rosalía has won eight Latin Grammy Awards and has become a key icon in the Latin music business. Her sounds have “prompted the Spanish music industry to up its game in terms of quality, reach, and debate” (Alonso 2019). We are privy, under this calculation, to the semiotic LatinXness of this Rosalía and the countless up-and-coming Rosalías, as the Xness of Spaniards and Spanishness comes through the “smash[ing] together [of] new sounds from the Latin world” (Coscarelli 2022). Rosalía amasses a lavish Hispanidad that may be unrecognizable even in Spain. She may blur the borders of what it means to be a Latin artist (Agrelo 2019). But she also obscures what it means to be a *Spanish* artist.

Something is happening here. The prospective European capital of Spanish relies on a scattered *mélange* of Spaniards and non-Spaniards. Certainly Madrid’s blueprinting as a cityscape of the future has antecedents, as literary and cultural studies scholar Jill Robbins writes. Over the years, the People’s Party and the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party have tried “to promote the image of a modern and democratic Spain, supported by

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neoliberal projects of urban reconstruction designed to transform Madrid from a third-level European city, or what [urban theorist] Neil Brenner has called a ‘national urban center,’ into a ‘global capital’” (Robbins 2019, 7). While “Madrid enjoys an increasing popularity as a tourist destination, the majority of its visitors see little more than the Prado Museum or the Royal Palace and spend the rest of their time escaping to the surrounding towns and villages” (Jacobs 1996, 16). Per *El Periódico de España*, Madrid has evolved into a refuge capital for Latin American investments, receiving the greatest business among the country’s autonomous communities. It is where “the headquarters of the main Latin American multilateral and financial institutions are located in Europe, such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Latibex, the Ibero-American Federation of Stock Exchanges (FIAB), the Ibero-American General Secretariat (Segib), the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science, and Culture (OEI), [and] the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF)” (*El Periódico de España* 2022). And, as the *New York Times* made known, “the Spanish capital is rivaling Miami as a haven for Latin Americans—and often for their money, too” (Minder 2022). Still, Ayuso’s nod toward Madrid’s role as a preeminent city leans on a Latin cultural capital comparable to Latin Miami’s (Jacobs 1996, xi). She yields passage to something Latin-like—a stream operated, 24/7, by Latin-like bodies.

At once hegemonic yet open to profiting from the peripheries of the Americas, Ayuso’s Hispanidad depository circumscribes, contains, and exalts a Spanish language, Spanish heritage, and Spain’s Spanishness. Latin goods script Eurocentric Madrid as the new Miami. A Latin sound, Latin culture, Latin boom, and Latin community are on Madrid’s horizon—a futuristic Latining. The itinerant Latin of the Americas is en route to becoming the Latin of Europe. Unfastened, a LatinX Hispanidad of deformation is what awaits this Xeroxed Miami, or clever Madrileñidad.

Madrid, in a manner of speaking, is already Miami and possibly becoming the European capital of Spanglish, chock-full of English in its daily life and in its “Globish”—global English—fluency. English’s predominance in popular communication is such that it caught the attention of the authoritative Real Academia Española (RAE, Royal Spanish Academy, founded in 1713). In 2016, RAE—perhaps fearing the loss of its linguistic grip and taking what now looks like a preemptive strike against Madrid’s vernacular “degradation” and “Miamiization”—started the campaign “There’s Only One Mother Tongue” (*Lengua madre solo hay una*). This platform advanced the use of Spanish without Anglicisms, “especially in the

field of advertising, a space particularly contaminated by the use of foreign words” (Palmer 2016). RAE sought to stop the “English invasion,” to which “there’s no short-term solution,” as the BBC indicated (BBC 2016).

Not to be overlooked is RAE’s 2012 definition of Spanglish “as a form of speech that mixes ‘deformed elements of vocabulary and grammar from both Spanish and English” (Garsd 2012). Linguist Ana Celia Zentella rebuffed the linguistic bureaucrats’ explanation, pegging it as “misinformed and offensive,” since there are many “fluent speakers of English and Spanish. Spanglish is a graphic, in-group way of saying ‘we speak both because we are both” (Zentella 2017, 33). Whether through scattered Anglicisms or Spanglish, an unstoppable, alternative vocabulary that is hardly static promulgates throughout Madrid. A transatlantic, pliable Spanish with wide-ranging histories and new sources, is playing out—unhindered. What does a global LatinX Spanglish transmit? And what do its unheard realms help us visualize?

LatinX is approached epistemologically here. Tracing its contemporary moment, I form a nexus with LatinX contemporaries in the world. Journalist Moha Gerehou, born in Huesca, Spain, to Gambian parents, hints that LatinX’s X is invariably a plural domain. His X arises from “the consolidation of a story in which we are always ‘them” (2021, 27). X’s intentional “theyness” and “themness” gesture toward a theory of the plural—an interactive X with a multitude of subjects and worlds. LatinX dialogues with the Iberian Peninsula, Spanish-speaking “communities,” and sociocultural imaginaries enmeshing Spaniards, Latin Americans, Indigenous peoples, and Latinos and beyond. LatinX is unkempt, without a proper place. Encouraging its engagement as a new present practice, its intellectual labor parses cultural currents.

This thought exploration is not a conspectus of Spanish politics, government, and party agendas. My effort is not a historical reprise of how Hispanidad and Día de La Raza have been taken up in different periods for cultural, ideological, or political purposes by Spanish writers such as Ángel Ganivet García (1865–98) and Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936); by the general and dictator Francisco Franco (1892–1975); and by the Spanish right. Hispanidad was “intended to strengthen ties between Spain and Latin America, emphasizing their shared past, language, culture, race and, especially, religion—but all in Spain’s interest. Hispanidad functioned as a ‘triple metaphor’ that conjured and linked the ideas of a national Spanish essence or soul, its crusading role for the Roman Catholic Church, and the ‘Golden Age’ of colonial power that connected Spain with its former

colonies in ‘Hispanoamérica’” (Anderson 2021, 170). I sift through the extant iteration of Hispanidad’s political crafting in Spain, its monocultural simplification, and its impact on how it shapes our globalized LatinX era.

Hispanidad’s Geographies + Spanish Linguistic Landscapes

What does a Spanish-speaking Hispanidad do for “the people of Europe,” for “feeling European,” and for European knowledge production, as theorist Roberto Dainotto puts it, particularly when the continent’s cultural identity summons a north/south dialectic situating its south—Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain—through “an unflattering acronym”: PIGS (2007, 1–2)? These southern nations with their audible southern accents are “the marginal inside of Europe”: they are, coevally, “Europe and non-Europe” (4). Hispanidad may be northern Europe’s antithesis and on the other side of US Latinidad. But it casts light on Europe’s new LatinX timelines, reorienting the United States as the main and verifiable hub of LatinXness. What makes this cobbled-together Latinness—from the making and remaking of “Latinos” and “Hispanics” by the US English- and Spanish-speaking media to Ayuso’s invisible but recycled Latin in Spanish Hispanidad—endlessly reproducible from place to place and from period to period? What is the gerrymandered path allowing Hispanidad to proceed?

The fate of Ayuso’s centralized linguistic regime depends on an unbridled roster of migrant groups and tourists for the European city’s sonic representation and narrativization. Far from having a ghostly sociocultural and political life, a LatinX swirl of ideas, things, persons, and actions move away from Ayuso’s clutches. Urban cultural studies scholar Araceli Masterson-Aguilar (2016) probes how Madrid’s Ecuadorians, with and without papers, have been key participants in the city via collective organizing and transnational discourses on citizenship. Communication scholars María Teresa Santos Diez and Jesús Ángel Pérez Dasilva survey a media landscape spurred by Spain’s Latin American migrants due to their poor portrayals in it (2016, 156). Free publications have materialized, making Madrid’s Latinos protagonists of their own information (142). Radio stations “constitute an optimal platform for the launching and dissemination of new records in Latin music and Caribbean rhythms” (152). *Despierta Latinx*—“a program of Latin American music, reflections, feelings, migrations, opinions, and muuuch hips” (A. Cultural La Kalle 2022)—airs the first Saturday of every month. It serves as a “bridge between migrant youth and their origins” and as a “vehicle for educational

issues that are important for their development” (Radio Kalle ¡Que No Calle! 2022).

Live comedy shows critiquing current events and cultural representations are surging. The monologues “Pa’ que nos conquistan” (Why Do They Conquer Us) is the first Latin American stand-up comedy performance credited to be made in Spain, defying stereotypes and conventions (Beatriz 2021; *El Periódico Latino* 2022). With live appearances in Barcelona and Madrid, “Why Do They Conquer Us” features Argentine, Chilean, Cuban, Dominican, Equatorial Guinean, and Venezuelan comedians. Beauty pageants connect dispersed communities and define—and crown—their aesthetic norms, engendering new traditions. In 2020, the Federation of Salvadorans in Catalonia selected Blanca Lilian Molina Rivera (christened Blanca the First) as Spain’s first Queen of the Salvadoran Community, succeeded by Alicia Beatriz Rivera Chávez (Beatriz Primera) in 2021 (*El Periódico Latino* 2020; *La Prensa Gráfica Italia* 2021). New lines of visualization are propelled by crisis and mobile “origins,” as artists and migrants declare in *El Otrx: Arte, cultura y migración en la ciudad de Madrid* (The Other: Art, Culture, and Migration in the City of Madrid; Graterol 2021)—highlighting questions of citizenship, administrative situations and setbacks, artistic practices, and the public sphere. Headlines in Mallorca capture the Mediterranean landscape’s transformation, announcing, “The Balearic Islands are increasingly becoming Latino islands.” “What is their current situation, and what are their challenges and concerns,” the outlet inquired regarding the Balearic archipelago’s Argentine, Bolivian, Colombian, Cuban, Dominican, Ecuadorian, Peruvian, Uruguayan, and Venezuelan residents (Ferragut 2019).

While Ayuso championed Hispanidad, an editorial in *El País*, a center-left publication, opposed her Office of Spanish by endorsing Pan-Hispanidad. “A cultural and linguistic space,” Pan-Hispanidad maintains “a democratic society’s values without imperial nostalgia or normative arrogance.” The op-ed stressed that language must be depoliticized, calling on the Cervantes Institute to forge Pan-Hispanic culture centers in Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, or Mexico City. This could “generate links in the broadest sense . . . and favor an intense circulation of ideas and images, lyrics, and music” (*El País* 2021). Ayuso’s Hispanidad and *El País*’s Pan-Hispanidad look to the Spanish-speaking American continent for cultural synergies.

Madrid’s president shined a light on Miami, a metropole with the sobriquets “Capital of Latin America” and “gateway to the Americas.” At

other times the Florida city has a disparaging appellation: “banana republic.” But it has also been dubbed “the vanguard city for inter-American commerce.” *Time* presaged this back in the 1940s: “Miami sits on the front door step of tomorrow’s big business” (quoted in Connolly 2016, 109). In the context of legendary Spanish crooners, three names with ties to the city stand out: Julio Iglesias, “the father (or grandfather) of Latin music’s current boom,” Raphael, and Camilo Sesto (Laguna 2022, 19). Miami became their geographic focal point during the 1970s because “they could own property there, use it as a home base for tours to Latin America, and they didn’t even need to speak English” (quoted in Lynch 2022, 58). Sociologist Alejandro Portes and political scientist Ariel C. Armony abridge Miami’s worldwide Latin image industry thus: “The boom in the production of telenovelas turned Miami into ‘a Hollywood of Latin telenovela.’ The city is home to the Latino Grammys, new album releases, music tours, and performances. As [Argentina’s] *La Nación* put it, ‘Every artist dreams of recording in Miami’” (2019, 135).

Sociolinguist Andrew Lynch proffers a view of the city’s potent socio-cultural milieu: “Spanish in Miami is both local and transnational without being national” (2022, xi). LatinX subjects inhabit the nation’s limits and avail themselves through linguistic adjustments. “Miami Spanish” and “Miami English” attest to linguistic revitalizations. Miami Spanish is marked by Colombians, Cubans, Dominicans, Ecuadorians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Venezuelans, and those Portes and Armony identify as “dark Latins—Nicaraguan, Honduran, and other Central American migrants” (2019, 149). “One of Miami’s main attractions for Hispanics,” declares sociolinguistics scholar Ana Roca, is that “being bilingual is the norm, with standard literate and professional varieties of Spanish rubbing elbows with many blue-collar versions, including a generous helping of code-switching” (2005, 112). Miami English has “lots and lots of calques, which are loan phrases: essentially direct translations” of Spanish expressions (Nosowitz 2017). Miami Spanish and Miami English thwart an Hispanidad organized and exclusively coined en español, setting up a strong foundation for LatinX experimentation.

El País moves farther south from Florida’s Magic City. The daily gives thought to Latin American national metropolitan centers with an ostensibly confined, monolithic Spanish. Hispanidad and Pan-Hispanidad are straightforward in the politician’s and newspaper’s valuations. They underline Romance linguist David Pharies’s *éclaircissement* that the Spanish language’s history “is a part of the history of Spain and Spanish

America. . . . A laboratory for historical linguistics,” Spanish provides “explanations for some of the language’s most interesting eccentricities” (2007, 4). Yet lively linguistic and cultural innovations have come about in LatinX conceptual spaces such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s borderlands and mestiza consciousness. Anzaldúa’s chef d’oeuvre, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), was translated in Spain a few years back, shedding light on an evolving Spanish that has been strutting its LatinX stuff toward the future since the twentieth century. Translator Carmen Valle Simón cues us in on LatinX Spanish’s circulation. She ponders the task of not just making legible “a book written mostly in English, with extensive fragments or words and phrases interspersed in Spanish and Nahuatl terms” (2016, 26). Valle Simón’s larger preoccupation lies in making Anzaldúa’s work translatable within “a historically monolingual culture anchored in the European translation tradition,” one “that especially appreciates steam-ironed and fallacious translations that should not show a single wrinkle of their translated textual character” (26).

Spreading Hispanidad and Pan-Hispanidad’s geographies would include Equatorial Guinea and the Philippines. The former is sub-Saharan Africa’s only Spanish-speaking nation: its ethnic groups speak their own language as well. Stamped as “Hispanidad’s best kept-secret” by linguist John Lipski, Guinean Spanish freely mixes with the speakers’ native languages. “It is frequently impossible to assign a conversation to a single language category and in this fashion many Equatorial Guineans are certain that they are speaking ‘only’ Spanish, Fang, Bubi, etc., when their linguistic production is marked by a high degree of code switching and introduction of words from other languages” (Lipski 2002, 72). In the Philippines, “only about 0.5 per cent” of its “100 million-strong population” speak Spanish, but “it’s still home to the most number of Spanish speakers in Asia” (Weedon 2019). Historian Vicente Rafael substantiates that Spanish is not obsolete there but is the basis for “Tagalog as it is currently spoken” (2016, 62) and that Castilian loan words “permeate nearly all Philippine languages. . . . Spanish words are immediately recognizable across vernaculars” (62–63). The paradox of Spanish arises: “Its power is felt most acutely when it has become powerless to command. It has been detached and broken up from its original speakers and woven into the fabric of local languages” (63).

Linguist Concepción Company holds a similar view of Mesoamerican Spanish, “a profoundly mestizo Spanish” (quoted in Osorio 2021). “The Spaniards who arrived in what is known today as the Republic of Mexico,” she notes, “had spent a long time in Cuba or the Dominican Republic.

They were linguistically acclimatized to a ‘flat’ kind of Spanish, because they were influenced by many dialects.” Sixteenth-century Seville “was a polyglot capital, because ‘the race to the Indies’ was fought by Andalusians, Castilians, Basques, Catalans, French, and Germans. There were also many Jews and many Muslims, as a few decades earlier, the Catholic Monarchs had taken the Kingdom of Granada.” A Spanish influenced by Andalusian and Caribbean dialects arrived in Mexico. Three languages coexisted in the sixteenth century: “Spanish was the language of conquest; Latin was the language of science; and Nahuatl was the language of daily life, spoken by many people.” Indigenous groups “adopted Spanish because it was more fluid and faster for them to communicate in Spanish than to communicate in Nahuatl and to look for an interpreter. That was not because of ‘how nice it sounds.’ It was purely for survival” (Company, quoted in Osorio 2021).

X’s harbinger the scramble from one mode of existence to another. Native literary scholar Scott Richard Lyons invokes the *longue durée* of unreadable X-marks to connote presence and agreement in what became the United States and Canada. Used by Indigenous populations to sign treaties and legal documents during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these marks led to the “loss of land and political autonomy, assent to assimilation policies, [and] the creation of quasi-private property on communal lands” (Lyons 2010, 1). But they are also part of the X subject’s endurance, historical development, and tenacity. X’s lay out “impurities, contradictions, misconceptions, mistaken identities, liminality, and irony” (Lyons 2010, xi). They are an aperture to “address our historical moment honestly”; to “admit to our impurities”; and “to connect ideas and events to the material conditions of daily life” (xii). Lyons notes: “There is always the prospect of slippage, indeterminacy, unforeseen consequences, or unintended results; it is always possible, that is, that an x-mark could result in something good” (3). X’s insistent existence lays bare how one embarks on, manages, and explores life through a signifier that cannot be purged. With a knack for survival, X “simply works with what we have,” Lyons observes (10).

Madrid, Migrations, Panchification

Spanish is an accelerated X—a “something else” in the US and Spanish landscapes and beyond, akin to how LatinX mobile subjects become something else in transit and relocation. What of Madrid’s LatinX sound machine? Madrid’s demographic growth since the late 1980s includes

inhabitants from Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. As of 2020, “there were more than five million foreigners in Spain—eleven percent of the country’s forty-seven million population. A further five percent—more than two million people—have taken Spanish citizenship” (Dombey 2020). Literary scholars Silvia Bermúdez and Anthony Geist attribute Madrid’s transformation into a Global South capital to “historical events connecting Spain to some of its former colonies when, first, exiled Equatoguineans and then thousands of Argentineans and Chileans, all fleeing from violent dictatorships, began to arrive to Madrid and other Spanish cities” (2019, xi). The city, “as a ‘northern’ metropolis,” simultaneously functions within the Global North’s circuits via “its pockets of extreme wealth, neoliberal policies, and the impulse of globally connected financial institutions” (ix).

Madrid’s global Spanish doesn’t point neatly to Hispanidad’s Spanish. With its African, Asian, Eastern European, and Latin American migrations, common Madrilenian life showcases a porous crux of LatinX Spanish, or as queer Asian Spanish singer, DJ, and writer Chenta Tsai Tseng illuminates, Spanchinglish. Their lingua franca, a combination of Spanish, Chinese, and English, has been spoken since childhood “without criteria or any rule” (Tseng 2020). Tseng’s moniker, Putochinomariación (FuckingChinesefag), refutes, through their brainy, sparkling wit, their disparaging position in Spain’s social realm. In their memoir, they write that the name Putochinomariación emanates from the rage that they’ve silenced and “kept quiet about” (Tseng 2019, 139). Dedicated to the “people who grew up without referents and who at one point in their lives felt out of place,” the book is offered to “X”—“blank”—diasporas working out their own signifiers (9). Tseng moved from Taipei to Spain with their parents when they were eleven months old, but they are habitually recognized as a foreigner and regularly complimented for “speaking Spanish very well” (23, 21). Now in their thirties, Tseng frames their body as a political terrain produced by historical processes, not biological ones: “Even though I’m a Spanish citizen and my documents show it, I’m exposed to more complex problems like xenophobia, social, structural, or institutional racism, homophobia” (24). Tseng’s LatinXness interrupts the givenness of whatever Spanish may be—and whatever the language of the herd may be.

LatinX’s magnitude expands to an emergent political language, institutional restructuring, and strategies for well-being and equality. Take Serigne Mbaye, born in a Senegalese fishing village and a nationalized Spanish citizen. Living in Spain since 2006, he was elected as a deputy in 2021 for the

anti-austerity United We Can party in Madrid's regional assembly. A member of the Association for People without Papers and spokesperson for the Street Vendors Union, Mbaye ran because "that's where all discrimination begins" (Parra 2021). Rocío Monasterio, a spokeswoman for the far-right Vox party in the Madrid Assembly, accused Mbaye of entering Spain illegally.

"I'm Spanish like she is," responded Mbaye poignantly, in a Spanish bearing the traces of a Madrilenian accent and a French inflection. "I formally ask her to withdraw her racist words," he pressed on (Podemos 2021). Mbaye's colleagues greeted his remarks with applause as he raised the iconic Black Power fist of struggle and solidarity. The clenched fist asserts that "there's no one superior to anyone" (Viejo 2021). When asked why he thought Vox attacked him, Mbaye replied, "Entering Spain without papers is not a crime, it's an administrative offense." If illegality is constructed, performed, and strengthened through administrative design, so is Spanish national identity and its hierarchical social arrangements. Mbaye's "X" shakes things up. It rebuts the logic of colonial history, bringing its own messy details and history to bear. X may have been birthed from "illegality," but it foregrounds its presence, refuses to be kept in its place, and tracks Madrid as a Spanish capital city of migrants.

Transnational migrations, blackness, and LatinXness are all localized and joined in Spain, disrupting the US popular culture canon and hatching its own LatinX pop imaginary. Consider *Tina—El Musical de Tina Turner* (Tina—The Tina Turner Musical), which premiered at Madrid's Coliseum Theater in October 2021. Turner's African American Blackness is globalized and Latinized through the work of a Black cast and ensemble—acting and singing in Spanish. Afro-descended performers from Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, and Sierra Leone betray a LatinXness that has been centuries in the making. Their presence reminds us of Spanish legacies of slavery, colonialism, and forced migration. The thespians are remaking not just the Spanish capital but also US pop culture. Madrid audiences delight in LatinX Tina, one who is not envisioned, much less consumed, in the United States.

What should X's aspire to in Spain? What might articulations of LatinXness mean in Europe? The continent's demographics reflect a Latin American population in Spain, Portugal, and Italy estimated at 4.64 million (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Tàpies 2018, 199). A "strong labour demand in some sectors of production, with the highest offers of low-skilled jobs, such as agriculture, tourism, construction, as well as jobs in the domestic sphere, and growing ethnic businesses and entrepreneurship" have played

“a decisive role” in European relocations (200). Spain received the largest number of Latin Americans—becoming “a common destination for ‘mixed migratory flows,’ which include refugees, asylum seekers, [and] economic migrants,” among other exoduses (ReliefWeb 2020). Gerona, as a brief illustration, is now home to one of Spain’s largest Honduran communities. According to these migrants, Spain is a far better and more cost-effective choice than the United States. Getting to Spain can cost between \$1,200 and \$1,400—“with everything included”—whereas immigrating to the United States lies in the \$10,000 to \$13,000 range (Beato 2021). Labor figures from Spain’s National Statistics Institute indicate that Latin American migrants “earn on average almost 37 percent less”—the equivalent of falling behind about \$10,786 per year (EFE 2021). Even obtaining Spanish nationality does not readily translate into improved occupational opportunities and economic ascension. The domestic service and hospitality sectors depend on Latin Americans, who occupy Spain’s lowest-wage jobs.

Literary enterprises, as Peruvian author Gabriela Wiener explains, wrestle with the meanings of this racialized and exploited workforce. Living in Spain since 2003, she limns suspect, bastardized identities that proliferate across the country (Velasco 2021). Wiener frames Latin American migrants as residents of “Panchilandia”: “where everyone smiles and talks to us with affection. / They say with affection *panchi*, *panchita*, *machupicchu*, national holiday” (2021, 163). Spanish- and English-speaking empires induce Panchilandia. Wiener fuses the diminutive “Panchito,” Spain’s disparaging term for Latin Americans, and the suffix “-landia,” influenced by the English “land” and the Spanish translation of Disneylandia. People pay “good money” for Disney’s bliss (Capó Crucet 2019, 59). Getting to and toiling in Panchilandia comes at unreal prices too. Juxtaposing the synthetic world of Disney’s Magic Kingdom with the one that LatinXs encounter, Spain—or rather, the Kingdom of Spain—is living with its own Panchification. What un-Disneyfied fantasies do PanchitXs provide? What are PanchitX alternative social spaces?

Wiener’s symbolic place is ensured of its existence through a replenished “Panchi” labor force. Carolina Elías, who holds a law degree from El Salvador and a master’s in gender studies from the Complutense University of Madrid, is a spokesperson for the organization *Servicio Doméstico Activo* (Active Domestic Service). She discloses that “Spain has double standards: it doesn’t want ‘illegal’ workers, but it allows you to stay to exploit you.” Linking domestic service, low wages, and poor employment conditions to feminism, Elías continues, “Feminists break the glass ceiling, and foreign

domestic workers collect the glass” (quoted in Gerehou 2019). “Spain has more domestic workers than any other country in Europe. It’s a huge part of the culture,” reporter Jean Mackenzie imparts (Mackenzie 2020).

Wiener offers a front-row seat to how iconic PanchitX minions—nannies, caregivers, and domestic wage earners—theme, texture, and corporealize this Disney from Spain’s former colonies. PanchitXs embody mobility, strangeness, and familiarity. She voices: “My geography teacher in Peru / the one who taught me the scale, / the world’s latitude and longitude, / changes your father’s diaper, Spain. / Have a little decency” (Wiener 2021, 165). Wiener’s educator is downgraded to PanchitX helping hands. The vulnerable PanchitX caregiver—with origins in Panchilandia as much as in what journalist Lucía Mbomío, of Spanish and Equatorial Guinean descent, designates as “Pobrelandia” (Poorland; Mbomío 2021, 17)—faces carelessness, as the elder, vulnerable Spaniard reveals the hierarchical business of care. Wiener orients Spaniards toward common decency, enhancing a better quality of living, and reflection. What do the contours of ethical relations with LatinXs look like in the global city?

Spain’s motif of migrants as newcomers codifies a new/old binary. Their presence is perpetuated as “new,” as the new problematic present, and as new subject positions overtaking the old and familiar. Cultural critic Raquel Vega-Durán posits that discussions on migrants as “new Spaniards” contributes to their separation “from ‘real’ Spaniards.” They hinder “conversations about the reality of Spain today, when the encounters between Spanish-born citizens and newly nationalized Spaniards are giving way to mixed identities that go beyond the mere dichotomy ‘new’ and ‘old’” (Vega-Durán 2016, xvi). Spain’s “new present” gives the impression that “new migrants” from the “new world” are simply waiting to be absorbed through Hispanidad. Spanish cultural activities serve as the definitive realm of representation, a body of knowledge revising and standardizing Latin migrant culture.

Shortly after the opening of her Office of Spanish, Ayuso visited the Hispanic Society of America, in New York, and the Organization of American States, in Washington, DC. She made hostile remarks throughout her entire eastern corridor tour. The online publication *Hyperallergic* summarized the HSA appearance in this way: “Ayuso spoke favorably of US-Spain relations before launching into a diatribe against ‘revisionist, dangerous, and pernicious’ ideologies that she believes are leading to a ‘cultural regression.’ Calling for a ‘defense of real history,’ she criticized anti-colonial and Indigenous movements that challenge heroic narratives

of the Spanish conquest as a ‘dangerous current of communism through indigenismo that constitutes an attack against Spain’” (Di Liscia 2021).

The initial brio of Ayuso’s ceremonial Hispanidad evaporated as a stark battle with Indigenous and racialized populations surfaced. *Indigenismo*—a 1940s assimilationist policy embraced by Latin American governments—differs from present-day Indigenous movements reclaiming linguistic, cultural, spiritual, and land rights. Native peoples barely embraced communist ideology. It was regarded as another Western discourse requiring them to abandon their languages and cultures. Indigenous nations and communist leaders came into ideological conflict because of their divergent conceptions of land. Land rights are paramount to these communities’ ongoing relationship to their worldview: it’s more than just property (see Chacón 2018). The detected twenty-first-century communist menace is partisan currency for Ayuso, who ran for president on the catchphrase “Liberty or communism.” Glorifying the Spanish tradition’s lost glories, Ayuso’s animus flaunts an indifference toward the obliteration of Indigenous groups and peasants, as in the case of Guatemala. Their repression, rape, torture, and mass killing in the twentieth century were justified by accusations that they were evil communists (see Grandin 2000; Weld 2014).

Historian Richard Kagan locates the Spanish language’s US popularization, Pan-American sentiment, and Hispanidad to American foreign policy, cultural exchange, and intellectual capital. Three scenarios contributed to Hispanidad’s heyday: (1) Washington’s founding of the Bureau of International Affairs in 1889; (2) the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York; and (3) the construction of the Panama Canal from 1904 to 1914 (Kagan 2019, 188–89). In 1968, National Hispanic Heritage Week was launched under President Lyndon Johnson. Two decades later, President Ronald Reagan expanded it into Hispanic Heritage Month. Sociologist G. Cristina Mora inspects how the Hispanic category has been willed into being by way of a triumvirate coalition that formed “collaborative relationships”: (1) the US Census Bureau; (2) Spanish-language television networks such as Univision; and (3) civil rights organizations like the former National Council of La Raza (2014, 11). These three entities consolidated the US Hispanic definition. Legitimizing its use, this term’s stakeholders brought out “a shared interest in sustaining a new category” (Mora 2014, 13). What drives a twenty-first-century global Hispanidad? What kinds of Global South paths are we witnessing that do not model exemplary Hispanidad and Hispanics but actualize their breakdown through

LatinX's formidable and unmanageable gamut? Ever resistant, LatinX collides against Hispanidad.

During the 1960s, the tourist slogan "Spain Is Different" germinated under Franco's regime (1939–75), leading "to a radical change" in the country's "customs and social and visual landscape" (Sala 425 2014). Marketing the sea and the sunshine paved the way for "inexpensive and accessible resorts on the Spanish Mediterranean"—a large-scale tourism that became "the epicenter of one of postwar Europe's largest mass rituals, the beach holiday" (Pack 2006, 1–2; cf. Penyas 2021). The catchword that beckons today, "All Accents Fit in Madrid," ushers in an aural LatinXness for tourist pleasure, an exuberant LatinX soundscape. That all accents fit in Madrid is not new—or news. The question becomes: How does the city's Spanish accent fit in and align with the "7.5 percent of the world population who speak it and make it the second most used language" (Olaya 2022)? The outgrowth of Madrid's LatinX sounds will presumably animate the city's Spanish, spreading it to mass audiences. But Madrid may shift focus to unwieldy LatinX excess—or "loudness." At what point do penetrating gusts of flexible LatinX chatter become a potent new medium, or noise pollution for Hispanidad?

Ethnomusicologists Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes hold that "the South has been associated with sound, music, body, presence, nature, and warmth" (2019, 1). Sound and South are twinned "relational figures," as are conjectural LatinXs and the Global South's conceptual cartographies. The two are "the Others of the visual and the North. Like poles in any binary opposition, 'sound' and 'South' can easily be substituted for multiple 'Other' terms, including 'nature,' 'woman,' 'native,' 'Africa,' 'black,' 'queer,' and 'disabled'" (Steingo and Sykes 2019, 1–2). This spurs a "conjunctural approach to sound that thinks various domains—musical, scientific, linguistic, theological, political" (7). Urban sounds, as sociologist Rowland Atkinson details them, denote "the constituent and shifting bundles of noise, sound and music emanating from shifting patterns of industry, traffic, leisure, talk and other sound sources in the city to create a sensory departure-point for defining and further understanding the fabric of the urban" (2007, 1905). These clusters of noise foment Madrid as an aural LatinX city with a ubiquitous and expansive reach.

Spain, Spanishness, LatinXness

If the Americas' muted and mutable Latin has a function in multiethnic Madrid's Hispanidad, what of the hidden yet unmistakable LatinXness of

Spanishness and Spaniards? As literary theorist María DeGuzmán reminds us, “‘Spain’ and ‘Spaniards’ are abstracting unifications for people and places historically heterogeneous, nonunitary, and constantly changing” (2005, xvi). LatinX’s association with conventional understandings of Latin America hobnobs with Spanish intimacy. Spain and Spanishness are scarcely an “Old World source of pure Hispanicity,” as DeGuzmán conveys (293). They are producers and recipients of X as much as Latin.

Recall Prudencio de Pereda, a novelist and translator who in 1960 published his third fictional work, *Windmills in Brooklyn*. The story revolves around Brooklyn’s Spanish Colony in the 1910s to the 1920s—a few decades after the Spanish Empire waned in the Americas—and the hardships of its *teverianos*, cigar vendors. A *New York Times* reviewer said the book was penned “with gusto about the joys of a Latin heritage” (Prescott 1960). The son of migrants, de Pereda was born in 1912 in Brooklyn Heights, the Spanish Colony’s home turf. The neighborhood was “a little-known segment of [New York] society. . . . [It] was just as intensely Spanish as other sections of the city were Italian, Jewish, Polish, or Armenian” (Prescott 1960).

De Pereda’s snapshots of Brooklyn’s shrinking Latin margins show a LatinX becoming through resilience. Yanqui power at the turn of the century haunts the novel’s migrants, who have not lost their connections with Spain, speak little English, “and never thought of themselves as Americans” in the US sense (de Pereda 1960, 46). Transnational marriages are not uncommon. Some characters travel back and forth between the colony and a Galician pueblo. An italicized Spanish “foreign” language molds the protagonist’s subjectivity, and a blackened LatinX alien whiteness, as DeGuzmán might call it, demonstrates how laboring Spaniards are exploited. “I was tired of seeing a Spaniard take it from everybody,” the narrator, the only one in his family to go to college, proclaims (de Pereda 1960, 85). In one instance of rhetorical strength, a Puerto Rican attends a Spaniard’s wake “for the warmth and the company”—a moment of LatinX recognition (94). This Puerto Rican–Spanish representation of death—and life—is anything but morbid. The two bodies, disconnected from their points of origin, transition into LatinXness and gain meaning, indexing two interruptive yet continuous LatinX ambiguities in relation to each other.

Literary historian Kirsten Silva Gruesz offers insights into Spanish signifiers’ slippery overflow. “As an adjective of identity, ‘Spanish’ is ambiguous: it can be used as a demonym (someone from Spain), an ethnonym (someone, including in the Empire, of Spanish ancestry), or a glottonym

(someone who speaks Spanish). In the US context, these categories have often blurred: the group now characterized as ‘Latino’ was bureaucratically labeled ‘Spanish-speaking’ during the early twentieth century, pressing the glottonym into use as an ethnonym” (Gruesz 2021, 31). Kagan expounds on the elasticity of the noun *Spaniard*. It intermingles with and acquires potency from “the customs and traditions from various parts of the Spanish-speaking world . . . together with those of the Hispanic population—referred to as ‘Spanish Americans’ in the nineteenth century—residing in the American Southwest” (Kagan 2019, 18–19). Spanish and *Spaniard*’s constancy of meaning is “X.” They are too rich—hippopotamic—to nail down. The whole kit and caboodle that DeGuzmán, Gruesz, and Kagan delineate is contingent on an ecology of meaning without closure.

The X of “Spanish” and “Spaniard” opens LatinX’s door wide, exposing the performance of Spanish national identities, as peninsular cultural studies scholar Susan Martin-Márquez observes. Spanish nation-building takes on “the phenomenal success of the ‘whitewashing’ of Spanish history after 1492,” which extirpated “all remnants of Islamic and African influence” (Martin-Márquez 2008, 3–4). Spanish omits and admits. It’s Latin America and much more. LatinX’s layered lines of contact direct us to make sense of Europe’s LatinXness, transatlantic power relations, and processes of becoming.

X Idiom

How LatinX moves, dissolves, and is assembled in present-day Spain and elsewhere is a critical structure of engagement. So is the speculative quest of what else might be on its way. Core to this approach is the remapping and piecing together of a labyrinthine LatinXness, a semiotics of disorientation that makes it possible to be on the lookout for Spanish LatinXness, or LatinX “Hispanidad.”

RAE’s director, Santiago Muñoz Machado, called Ayuso’s Office of Spanish an “anecdote”—a lightweight incident (RTVE.es/EFE 2021). I draw from this professed minor event on different, tantalizing grounds. Ayuso’s Hispanidad exceeds Spanish instruction, grammatical regulation, and mastery. Her arrangement magnifies Spanish—shaping, coaxing, and controlling an industry outside RAE’s decorum, the Cervantes Institute, and the University of Salamanca. What is Latina/o public discourse in Spain? How is it nourished? What makes it pleasurable? Hispanidad’s repertoire needs a “naturalness,” a fabricated “authenticity,” imagery, videos, sounds,

discourses, and styles that make it worthy of attention again and again. And it must be recognizable everywhere. How Spain's LatinX moment is addressed, registered, communicated, and manipulated, with or without Ayuso, goes beyond facile entertainment. It assists us in appraising the value of the "thing"—the Latin "something"—that plays a central role in the United States and Latin America and accrues greater and greater worth in Spain.

Ayuso's politics of Hispanidad goodwill—"for Hispanics and non-Hispanics," as office director Toni Cantó put it—have yet to go stale (Comunidad de Madrid 2022). The first celebration was quite successful, luring 100,000 visitors. Madrid hosted the second edition in October 2022, extending its boundaries to Barcelona, a city that counts 22.4 percent of its population as foreign-born (Mur 2021). RAE's initial skepticism dissolved, participating in Hispanidad 2022. Ayuso had a reservoir of soundbites at the ready: Hispanidad is "more fashionable than ever," a way of living that's "fascinating, creative, and that seduces the whole world," with Madrid as its "common square." Hispanidad "makes us European—Western—in a unique and irreplaceable way" (Comunidad de Madrid 2022). Her vigilant platform included the Philippines and Equatorial Guinea this time around. But "the main course" was the performance "by a Latin artist 'of recognized prestige': Colombian singer and songwriter Camilo (Medialdea 2022). Ayuso's handling of a collective identity through lucrative Latin entertainment makes her a celebrity politician, a fan of the Latin thing she created, and a contributor to how Spain's Latina/o history is being shaped.

LatinX is disposed to hermeneutic testability. It dares present-day thinking and endeavors with perplexing what-ifs, not to arrive at clarity but at malleable understandings. What runs through global LatinXness? What does it mean to pursue what we know and do not know about global LatinXness, its plural ontologies, and miscellany through the everywhere-ness of popular culture and public relations? What is global LatinX popular culture? LatinX—its strangeness, curiosities, irreverence, its unsettling of the everyday order of things—is surplus content, a magnet, an encounter that is fleshed out and fused together through hearsay and speculation. A "minor," "unauthorized," and dismissed subject matter where nothing is out-of-bounds, LatinX is au fait with the present and the future of LatinX stories in their physical and virtual formats. Anecdotes, political machinations, ubiquitous forms of popular entertainment, headlines, history, humor—anything that informs, inquires, alters our awareness, and contributes to unrestricted facets of life—has a place in LatinX's elastic parts.

What are LatinX's starting points? What is LatinX's intellectual heritage? What is a LatinX diaspora? Speaking at the Free University of Berlin, feminist poet Audre Lorde discussed the need to visit Western Europe so that the continent ceased to be a concept or theory (2020, 22). She sought Black German women whom Lorde "knew existed but about whom [she] could not find references in New York. . . . Who are they, these women of the African Diaspora, the Afro Germans," she asked, wanting to know more about "their fathers, homelands, comparisons, joys, disappointments" (265).

There is no LatinX checklist. Not all X's present themselves in the same way. And one should never rule anything out of X. Plotting an X idiom—LatinX's circumnavigation and progress across the Atlantic—works toward comparative explorations, urgencies, and connective histories of how LatinX materializes, is globally chronicled, and altered. Evaluating LatinX Spain and all the sprawling pieces of the world within it tackles the new language and sociocultural formations disrupting Hispanidad and US exceptionalism.

X, says philosopher John D. Caputo, "does not signify depth, but drift" (2021, xxvii). LatinX's depth varies. It's a hermeneutic necessity for the Global South, the West, and the Americas. A partial picture, LatinX drifts and evolves, turning up in some form and in parts unknown.

Country X awaits, unfurling LatinX's power of genesis.

Note

The brilliant presence and great care of Arturo Arias, Gloria Chacón, Eduardo Contreras, María DeGuzmán, Elia Romera-Figueroa, Richard Rosa, and Ana Ugarte led to these pages. Many thanks for your wonderful willingness to roll up your sleeves, read these musings, and see the big picture with me. Special thanks to Ben V. Olguín for this forum and support. In honor of my little cat, Theodor W. Adorno (2006–22)—my side-by-side writing companion and adventurous sidekick, on the last piece we worked on together—remembered with love, gratitude, and smiles.

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Xicano “World” Traveling and World Making

Aotearoa Meets Aztlán

Roberto D. Hernández

“Who Is a Chicano? And What Is It the Chicanos Want?” was the title of a *Los Angeles Times* article dated February 6, 1970, written by *Times* journalist Ruben Salazar. Less than seven months later, Salazar was killed under questionable circumstances by a Los Angeles County deputy sheriff. The article’s opening line, “A Chicano is a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of himself,” has arguably become immortalized as one of his most recognizable quotes. Elsewhere I have raised the issue of a reductionist reification that delimits *Chicano* to the modern/colonial national-territorial (United States and Mexico) and temporal (1848) logics that the term, in its embrace of a hemispheric indigeneity, sought to evade (Hernández 2021). Nevertheless, it is notable that the second line of the article unequivocally places the Chicano as a world-historical subject at the crossroads of cross-Atlantic travel and the clashing of civilizations during the so-called discovery of the “New World.” Salazar (1970) writes, “He [the Chicano] resents being told Columbus ‘discovered’ America when the Chicano’s ancestors, the Mayans and the Aztecs, founded highly sophisticated civilizations centuries before Spain [sic] financed the Italian explorer’s trip to the ‘New World.’” Salazar was himself a world traveler of sorts, having been a Korean War-era veteran stationed in Germany and later the first Latino foreign correspondent in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic prior to becoming the *Los Angeles Times* bureau chief in Mexico City. Despite his travels and the growing support for and chronicling of the burgeoning Chicano movement in the late 1960s, he remained a man of this world, committed to his vocation as a journalist and wanting to

make Mexican Americans, or the self-identified Chicano, legible to the American public and polity.

In this essay, I foreground a distinct form of “world” traveling articulated by decolonial philosopher María Lugones, one that makes possible the varied projects of world making, or prefiguring the future worlds we want to inhabit, not constrained by what I have called the epistemic and cartographic prison of modernity/coloniality. In *Coloniality of the U-S/// Mexico Border: Power, Violence, and the Decolonial Imperative*, I identify an “epistemic and cartographic prison of modernity/coloniality,” as the dominant world’s simultaneously material and ideological compartmentalization and scaffolding of the globe into national-territorial units such that individuals and collectivities enact and police their own (and others’) subjectivities and sense of selves only as legible through the nation-state form and its ensuing national identities (Hernández 2018). Here, I reflect on Lugones’s expansive notion of world(s) and “world” traveling. In turn, I analyze how Xicano encounters and world/“world” traveling through not only Amerindia (that is, the Western Hemisphere) but also historic Al-Andalus and Aotearoa (New Zealand), in the context of the Decolonial Dialogues seminars I have been conducting over the past twelve years, can fundamentally help us rethink Xicano@ indigeneity in relation to contemporary global indigeneities. This necessarily entails an unthinking of the nation-state form as the only form of national coherence and the emergence of a new form of horizontal intraworld and interworld communication and world making guided by loving perception and a politics of liberation as praxis.

Chicana/o/x studies has long consisted of diverse intellectual and ideological genealogies and theoretical frameworks, which have included consistent, albeit haphazard, internationalist and indigenist tendencies since the birth of the discipline. Despite such heterogeneity, one dominant trope that has been hard to shake off is the idea that Chicanidad is necessarily tied to a Mexican American reality or a historical link to the cartography and colonial episteme (mestizaje as nation-building myth) of

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Mexico by extension. A critique that has been anchored in such ideological linkage has been the idea of Aztec- or Mexica-centricity in much of Chicana/o studies' engagement with indigeneity. The purpose of this essay is to engage and challenge said critique by contextualizing it in terms of the knowledge base available at the time, as well as by foregrounding the horizontal accompaniment that has been more central to the praxis of Xicano indigeneity, in large part through political solidarities with global resistances among other colonial subjects. Moreover, such global engagement is also key to rearticulating conceptions of indigeneity proper as well as of Chicanidad and the long-standing concept of Aztlán that has been so foundational to Chicana/o/x studies. Despite recent debates about the utility of Aztlán as an organizing principle or axis mundi, the interface with Al-Andalus and Aotearoa provides key lessons for the continuing significance and re-signification of Aztlán.

"World" Traveling through a World in Which Many Worlds Fit

In *Pilgrimages: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, Lugones addresses the spatiality of social relations and multiple forms of travel and mobility. She seeks to challenge the presumed natural link between a "western middle-class idea of chosen and leisured journey"—historically, as settlers, colonists, explorers, adventurers, and more recently as tourists—as the purview of white, heteronormative, middle-class, often masculine-encoded travelers (Wolff 1993, 225, cited in Lugones 2003). Lugones joins Wolff, Caren Kaplan (1996), Mary Louise Pratt (1992), and others in highlighting how the ability to travel has been circumscribed by entanglements of masculinity, leisure, slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy. In this regard, "unbounded mobility and masculinity are intrinsically connected" (Lugones 2003, 17). However, she reminds us that colonization and slavery, as the disruption of other world socialities, have often entailed displacement and thereby a forced mobility or conditioned world traveling under precarious circumstances. Such placements and displacements have also provided the condition of possibility for encountering other similarly displaced forced exiles, irrespective of whether the existing political economies and reigning Westphalian political-territorial order acknowledges them as fellow travelers or attempts to render them "illegal," unwanted, irregular migrants, or "aliens." The latter is fundamentally a question of existing power relations. Providing an early theoretical framework by which to better elucidate the

workings of the cartographic and epistemic prison of modernity/coloniality, Lugones writes from an understanding that all our lives are “spatially mapped by power,” and we thereby need conceptual clarity on the notion of “world” if we are to make sense, for example, of the Zapatistas’ call for “a world in which many worlds fit” as one demarked by our own calendars, geographies, and ways of being (2003, 8).

In a sense, Lugones’s concept of “world” is not reducible to a worldview or to ideas of culture that we usually ascribe to distinct peoples or nations, though it does involve “flesh and blood” in regard to how actual people, individually and collectively, exist and move in the realm of existence, or the physical world. For Lugones, “there are many ‘worlds’, not autonomous, but intertwined semantically and materially,” and each “stand[s] in relations of power to other ‘worlds’ which include a second order of meaning” for how we conceive travel in between such multiple worlds (2003, 20–21). She thus uses the notion of “world” travel for “all people who have been subordinated, exploited, and enslaved” and “forced to travel” to worlds other than their own; transported from their territories and forced to exist in others’ worlds according to logics of exploitation and visions of socialities unlike their own. The practice of “world” traveling is thus one of simultaneous placement and displacement, yet she is “interested in freeing this practice from its connection to subordination, shifting the directionality and intentionality of travel” to envision and enact other possibilities akin to the Zapatistas’ decolonial horizon (17–18).

Visualizing the mappings of power, Lugones notes that when we travel, we may “go places as boss, pleasure seeker on the labor of others, tourist, colonizer, and user of people’s lives and labor without being touched by . . . them” (9). Here, the “them” as racial/colonial “other” points to the historically inextricable link between unrestrained mobility of white colonial enterprises and leisure. In contrast, if you are “one of the dominated, your movements are highly restricted and contained,” often entailing displacement and continued surveillance and policing of bodies and movements (9). Thus my reference to a prison. Importantly, “world” traveling for Lugones is not just about physical travel but also about partaking in the world of others on their terms, not one’s own, nor is it marked by individual or societal expectations and imaginations. She differentiates the sense of travel she has in mind “through unveiling an insurgent practice” of world sensing and world making that leisurely colonial mobility “necessarily veils.” The distinction from the traveling of settlers and tourists is necessary “precisely because they perceive/imagine only the ‘exotic,’ the ‘Other,’ the ‘primitive,’

and the 'savage' . . . inextricably connected to epistemic imperialism and aggressive ignorance" (18). As such, those shaped and informed by colonial and racist subjectivities and logics of domination "do not travel epistemically, but rather are involved in narcissism," even if they may be physically moving across multiple geographies in the physical world (20).

"World" traveling among racial/colonial subjects is "one of those ways of keeping oneself focused on resistance, one that enables us to exercise the multiple visions, multiple sensings, and multiple sense makings" (7). It is about recognizing how borders also contain us "in a systematic way from getting together against the grain of power." Awareness of borders thus amounts to studying one's spatiality and, by extension, the workings of power. It is about a self-consciousness of one's emplacement on a map, recognizing that "you are concrete. [Yet] your spatiality, constructed as an intersection following designs of power, isn't" (10). The discrepancy between the two plotments provides insight and a sense of direction. Here, it is important to cite Lugones at length:

In understanding this map, one can also begin to understand all the ways in which oneself and others violate this spatiality or inhabit it in great resistance, without willful collaboration. Indeed, it seems very important to count as resistance all those tensions whose logic belongs to a logic of resistance, even when they do not redraw the spatiality. (10)

"World" traveling is thus about "sensing the geography looking for signs of power and of limitations, reductions, erasures." She identifies sensing, or *tanteando*, as a form of double consciousness that necessitates a flexibility and refusal to reduce other possible worlds to ossified conceptions of tradition or culture. Lugones continues:

By travelling to other people's "worlds," we discover that there are "worlds" in which those subjects who are victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable. (97)

To truly travel and not simply move about in the world, as has been the case for universal man, is to engage others in their own "worlds." This way of being, offered by Lugones, stands in direct opposition to the quintessentially colonial gaze of conceiving of others in their natural habitat, where they become animated as near beasts, sub- or nonhuman "others" either to be sublimated into a presumed universal version of oneself or to face extermination as an existential threat to one's conception of universe.

The epistemic and cartographic prison of modernity/coloniality, the bordering and ordering of the globe, is one where we are kept apart by “social fragmentation . . . [where] we have not realized the potential lying in our becoming interdependently resistant” (Lugones 2003, 85). Against the univocal, unilinear, categorical understandings of history and oppression, we must instead learn to unlearn the categories that keep us divided and further constrain our collective sense of selves as Xican@s as a unified, sociohistorical formation. Xican@s are as varied, in every way, as the inscriptions we use to identify them. Lugones thus highlights how borders—national-territorial, physic, epistemic, and social alike—“produce atomic social groups and block interworld or intraworld communication” (26). Moreover, they make it difficult for us to become “sufficiently familiar with each other’s ‘worlds’ of resistance to either cross, or travel to them, nor to avoid what keeps us from seeing the need to travel, the *enriching of our possibilities* through ‘world’-travel” (84, my emphasis). Until we take all our various others as a starting point to reflect on our own sense of individual and collective selves, we/Xican@s run the risk of remaining trapped in that prison. It is in and through the possibility of “world” traveling that we are then able to better reflect on ourselves. This was my experience when I traveled physically and epistemically to Māoridom, or the Māori world, beyond my physicality in the territory currently known as New Zealand. I ventured to the North and South Islands of Aotearoa not as a tourist but rather as an individual engaging responsibly and horizontally with my Māori hosts as an extension of the Decolonial Dialogues initiated in the muggy Mediterranean plazas of Barcelona.

Decolonizing Knowledge and Power and Critical Muslim Studies

Since 2009, a number of my *colegas* (colleagues) came together to create Dialég Global: Center of Study and Investigation for Global Dialogues based out of Catalunya. The purpose of the civil association, which is akin to a cross between a nonprofit organization and an independent think tank in a US context, was to establish a summer school dedicated to bringing together people from across colonial and postcolonial contexts to engage with invited faculty and one another on what it means to decolonize knowledge and power. This international school, called Decolonizing Knowledge and Power, would be based in Barcelona. While an earlier dossier in *Aztlán* addresses that project more at length (Hernández 2022),

it is important to note here that most of the participants came from both the Global South and the Global North, meaning racial/colonial subjects and/or people of color in western countries, with several Chicanas/os among the ranks. From the resulting dialogues, we found they were not global but inter-epistemic, albeit not in pursuit of a flattening of differences into the presumed universal. Indeed, a founding principle was not to erase our particularities in the name of a universalism that erases difference, but rather, as Aimé Césaire wrote to Maurice Thorez in his letter of resignation from the Communist Party of France: "There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the 'universal.' My conception of the universal is that of a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars" (Césaire 2010, 152). As such, we realized the need for more specialized conversations, which in turn led to the formation of similar *escuelitas* (alternative schools), each with a respective focus. For example, Muslim students who participated in the initial seminars raised the issue of needing to first figure out for themselves what it meant to think decolonially while grounded in Islam before being able to partake in the "pluriversal" knowledge production and world making our seminar aspired to enact.

In response, Dialeq Global created the Critical Muslim Studies program in the city of Granada, the last stronghold of historic Al-Andalus. It was intended as a space devoted not only to Muslim students but also to those grounded in the study of Islam, to tease out what a decolonial Islamic thought might look like. Another group of us designed the *Pensamientos y Feminismos Descoloniales Latinoamericanos* (Latin American Decolonial Thought and Feminisms) seminar, held each spring in Mexico City, with a focus on Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in the Spanish-speaking former colonies. This third program made it a point to count on a (limited) US Chicana/Latina presence and representation; it was limited so as not to allow those from the Global North, even if they were colonial subjects within it, dominate the conversation or agenda. A fourth program was launched in Cachoeira, Bahia, Brazil, on Decolonial Black Feminism, which brought together mostly Brazilian, African American, and South African (predominantly) women in an internal conversation on decoloniality, in this case across a mix of Portuguese, Portuguese, and English translations. Over the years, a few other seminars were attempted with less success, and a number of offshoots have arisen in places such as South Africa, Turkey, and India, organized by past participants in Barcelona

and Granada. A brief but important related effort in Amsterdam was titled *Decolonizing the Mind*, under the leadership of Sandew Hira.

In Granada in particular, the interface between Inquisitorial Christendom forces and the expulsion of Muslims and Jews, as well as the green-lighting of Columbus's voyage and the development of the human trade of enslaved Africans, brings to light that the creation of the modern world occurred not with the Industrial Revolution but in 1492 and has always been a colonial endeavor (Dussel 1992); hence the necessity to speak of a modern/colonial world wherein race becomes a dominant organizing principle (Quijano 2000). For this same reason, colonization, and coloniality as its logic, produced both colonial subjects and colonial/racial(ized) subjects. Indigeneity in this regard emerges not as a biological or even territorial (Americas) category or identity but as a colonial/racial relationship by which the various diverse peoples encountered (Arawak, Mexica, Maya, Haudenosaunee, and hundreds of other nations) were indigenized, understood as a form of colonial/racial subjection (Hernández 2016). Chican@s in turn emerge as the self-conscious and amorphous collective subjectivity of a heterogeneous amalgamation of diverse peoples who were indigenized, then deindigenized by over five hundred years of colonization and the ideological construct of *mestizaje*. Powhatan scholar Jack Forbes, in an essay from 1973 titled "The Mestizo Concept: A Product of European Imperialism," and anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, in his pathbreaking book *Mexico Profundo* (1996), both acknowledge that while biological mixture was a reality, cultural *mestizaje* remained elusive as the newly deindigenized Mexicans (and, I would add, other "Latinx/Latin American" populations) have nevertheless retained their fundamental "indigenous" character and cultural content even if they are now viewed as generic *mestizas/os*. Whiteness, and a presumption of white supremacy, as foundational logics of the modern/colonial world took root in that moment of the victory of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon over the last Nasrid ruler, Abu Abdallah Muhammad XII (known as Boabdil in Europe) at the Battle of Granada on January 2, 1492. Only with the fall of Granada did Queen Isabella give Columbus authorization to head west. Understanding this initial 1492 date, as opposed to the more recognizable October 12, when Columbus set sail, is thus crucial for grasping the logics of white supremacy that sought to erase what had been seven centuries of racial *mestizaje* on the Iberian Peninsula. Ironically, it would be in Granada, where the last mosques of historic Al-Andalus would close their doors, that the first one in the last century would reopen. At this same mosque I would

encounter a community of Maya Muslims from San Cristobal, Chiapas, whom I had heard of and hoped to meet on my travels to Chiapas but had been unable to do so. The majority Tzotzil and Tzeltal Muslims, some of whom made clear to me they continue to be Maya first and foremost despite *shahada* (acceptance of Islam), also affirmed their subjectivity as Zapatistas, as supporters and sympathizers. Breaking bread with them for *iftar* during the long days of Ramadan in the Gran Mezquita de Granada indeed turns the myth of mestizaje on its head. Yet that is a story for another time and space.

Returning to Barcelona, these types of "other"-worldly encounters would form the basis for our horizontal "world" traveling during the past decade. As word of our summer program began to circulate, we saw an exponential growth in interest stemming from various parts of the physical world. It is in this context that we were first contacted by a Māori colleague, Veronica Tawhai, then a graduate student at the University of Massey, in Palmerston North, New Zealand, inquiring about the possibility of a similar program in Aotearoa. At first this seemed counterintuitive, as Aotearoa had been recognized as an important site of decolonial approaches to knowledge production following the publication of the now classic *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) by Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith. However, we were intrigued by the idea and wanted to understand the reason behind such a request. In our initial exchanges, it became clear that our Māori colleagues, Tawhai, Krystal Te Rina Warren, and Peter Meihana in particular, were embracing the dynamic expressed earlier herein as a part of a decolonial imperative: starting point other. More concretely, these three graduate students, who had heard of our work from a fourth Māori doctoral student, Hemi Hireme, then working at a university in the Nordic territories, were familiar with the Māori approach to decolonizing knowledge and wished to explore the views of other similarly yet distinctly situated colonial subjects in search of lines of research, theorizing, living, loving, and being in a decolonial way. While mounting a program like those in Barcelona, Granada, Mexico City, and Cachoeira would be a large endeavor, we were nevertheless excited. We began brainstorming the program's purpose and focus as a space of encounter for questions of decolonization and indigeneity among the English-speaking former colonial subjects. The program would focus on the Pacific, though not exclusively. In each of the previous cities, we had relied on colleagues with whom we had existing relationships; now, we asked our Māori relatives to join us in Barcelona for one of the two-week institutes. This would allow them to observe how we organized the *escuelita*: practically, conceptually, inter-epistemically, and pluriversally.

Māoris in the Mediterranean and Aztlán in Aotearoa

As summer of 2014 approached, we looked forward to the sixth iteration of the Decolonizing Knowledge and Power summer institute. Among the forty-plus participants we would receive that year, we were counting on a Māori delegation composed of two brave souls, Warren and Meihana, who would be venturing into Spain for the first time. This would be the first time anyone from Aotearoa had participated in our program. Although Tawhai had been the first to reach out to us, her late-term pregnancy made it difficult for her to travel. Nevertheless, I would be in charge of receiving participants upon their arrival. Much like the previous years, the lecture-intensive summer school meant that although we did have fruitful discussions in the classroom, at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona's historic Hospital Sant Pau facilities, much discussion would also spill out into the streets and plazas of Barcelona, most notably in the Barrio de Gràcia, where the participants were housed. In these twofold spaces of encounter, our Māori colleagues would be listening to the day's professors, to the various commentaries and exchanges of participants, and in particular to the program's overall organization. We managed to engage quite a bit during those two weeks, but nothing would compare to the invitation they then extended to me as program director to travel to their home territories in Aotearoa later that year to follow up with our initial dialogues in Barcelona.

It was in November of 2014 that I made my way to Aotearoa. My first task was to lead an intensive two-day seminar at Massey University, a variation on the two-week Decolonizing Knowledge and Power summer institute which Warren and Maheina had attended. This seminar was specifically for Massey Māori students and local Māori community members who participated via Te Pūtahi-a-Toi—School of Māori Knowledge—the site of the first Māori studies in New Zealand. Second, I was to give a keynote address, one of three at the Māori Association for Social Sciences (MASS) conference, alongside Moana Jackson and Margaret Mutu. While the two events spanned five days, my Māori hosts generously allowed me to be present in Aotearoa for a total of thirteen days, including a visit to Otago University, located on the South Island, where I conducted a daylong master class. There I also met up with Mahdis Azarmandi, a colleague from the Barcelona program and fellow “world” traveler and polyglot. She was in residence, completing a doctoral degree.

From the time I arrived at Massey, it was apparent that the Māori presence and relationship to the university was different from what I

had witnessed at other US universities. It shared parallels with my time at Canadian universities, which have a stronger First Nations presence in academic life and spaces. Of note, the two-day seminar began with a *Pōwhiri*, a traditional Māori welcoming ceremony. Prior to the start of the ceremony, I was briefed as to how the ceremony would be conducted, including instructions as to when I would have a chance to share some words. There was one condition, of course: "any language except English!" My colleagues remarked, "We know Spanish is a colonial language too, but that should be fine." To their surprise, I knew some limited Nahuatl, enough to make a proper introduction and share some of my *whakapapa* (genealogy), which is an important part of the ceremony. In the Māori ways of being, when people first meet and share their/our intentions with each other, it is also a meeting of the respective ancestors in the spirit world through our own face-to-face encounter. This notion of the face-to-face is literal and figurative as an embodied practice instantiated in the *hongi*, a Māori greeting in which two individuals gently press their noses together and, upon a moment of embrace, share a deep inhaling motion to signify that the sacred element of the air is the shared breath of life between both beings, making them relatives in a shared existence on this earth. This is the case whether one is visiting from lands afar, as I was, or whether it is an intraworld encounter between different *iwi* (tribes) from within Aotearoa.

The *Pōwhiri* itself was a polyvocal collective enterprise, with everyone having a role. It began with the women of one *iwi*, the group that had invited me, singing in a call-and-response to the women of the *iwi* on whose land we were. The singing included songs of introduction and of permission, which announced that we were coming in a good way and were seeking permission to enter their territory and to engage in *korero*. A word used in multiple variations for matters related to speech or speaking, here *korero* indicated the sharing of *whakapapa* and intentions. Once the host *iwi* sang back, granting permission, we slowly swayed toward the entrances of the building. We entered a large meeting room; inside, chairs had been arranged horizontally into two rows facing another two rows. We were asked to sit, men in each of the two front rows and women in the two back rows. My interpreter was quick to mention that in the Māori way, it is said that the women lead from behind, a reference to the more egalitarian-gendered relations of power that might not be perceivable to an outsider's gaze. Next, a representative of each *iwi* spoke on behalf of their respective group. Whereas in most *iwi* it is the eldest man who shares *korero* or *palabra* (the word) of the *iwi*, in some practices the eldest speaks irrespective of gender.

All of the Pōwhiri was conducted in Te Reo Māori, or the Māori language. After each “eldest statesmen” spoke, I was instructed to step forward and present myself and my ancestors to the iwi who were opening up their land to let me lead the two-day seminar.

As best I could, I introduced myself, sharing that I come on my mother’s, grandmother’s, and great-grandmother’s side from the Wīrrarika people and, on my father’s side, from a grandmother and great-grandmother of the Mam people, cut across by the relatively recent colonial borders of present-day Mexico and Guatemala. The occasion also called for an *ofrenda*, or offering. As I have been taught by my own elders, and their elders before them, in Kumeyaay territory where I reside, I had come prepared, having purchased a pouch of tobacco before the Pōwhiri. Unbeknownst to me, tobacco in Aotearoa comes with a warning that “this product may cause death.” After leaving the offering on the ground between us, a person from the host iwi made movements akin to a *haka* (ritual dance) and picked up the offering, dancing his way back to his seat, all the while gazing intently at me with wide-open eyes. I would find out days later that he was considered their weapons and martial arts expert and in that moment had to make a determination if indeed I had come with good intentions, warning label of death notwithstanding. To my relief, he joked about the moment and said that he knew he had to look past the label and recognize what the offering represented as seen from my own eyes. Finally, in what I was told was a semi-departure from the typical Pōwhiri, *palabra* was extended to Hemi Hireme, the doctoral candidate who had made the three Māori graduate students first aware of our program. Rumor had it that he had “gone out to the bush,” a reference to an off-the-grid lifestyle he had adopted after completing his dissertation. No one had seen or heard from him in three months, yet to everyone’s surprise he showed up at the Pōwhiri, where he was given the floor.

As he spoke, I was already familiar with at least two Māori words: *korero* (speech) and *pakeha* (white person). While I did not technically understand a sentence as he expressed it, I did feel that I caught the sentiment, as I heard a sequence that included three words—*decoloniality*, *korero*, *pakeha*—which made the room burst into laughter. As the interpreter confirmed, Hemi had said, “Decoloniality means to stop speaking like white people, and it is a reminder to again listen to Mother Earth.” Perhaps serendipitously—or was it mere coincidence?—in that instant Palmerston North experienced a small earthquake. Needless to say, the pressure was now on for my seminar. Hemi and I would become close friends over the two weeks.

I will not recap the two-day seminar and the generative exchanges that we had in that space. Instead, allow me to fast-forward to a few other experiences. During the few days between the seminar and the start of the MASS conference, I was taken to visit several spaces in town, including Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Mana Tamariki, a Te Reo Māori language school considered the best on the two islands. The director, Toni Waho, shared that while he was in college, as an urbanized Māori who had increasingly lost his ability to speak the language and was growing apart from traditional Māori practices, traditions, and knowledge systems, he participated in a study abroad program in British Columbia, Canada. One day he and some friends decided to take a road trip across the United States. After making their way down the coast, they headed east and found themselves in El Paso, Texas. They crossed into Ciudad Juarez, yet on the way back, US Border Patrol agents did not believe that Waho was a Māori college student in Canada. They almost denied him entry, thinking he was an "illegal" Mexican. It was this experience on the U-S///Mexico border that was instrumental in his coming to terms with his own indigeneity and the need to dedicate himself to Māori language and cultural revitalization. In that moment of deindigenization, he saw not only the dangers of losing connection to his whakapapa and *mana* but also the shared, albeit distinct, situation that Mexicanized, indigenized-but-deindigenized Peoples face as part of a parallel racial/colonial subjection rooted in Columbus's world traveling in 1492. Although the British did not arrive in Aotearoa until 1769, in the boots of Captain Cook, when the Māori recall the colonial disruption and reorganization of their "world," much like Ruben Salazar's classic article, theirs is a chapter that begins in 1492. They recognize, as do Xicanos, that the racial/colonial subjection that took shape in 1769 or 1848 cannot be properly understood without contextualizing it as part and parcel of the world-historical moment set in motion with the sailing of the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*.

As the MASS conference neared, participants began arriving for their own Pōwhiri ceremony. When the time came, I instinctively gravitated toward this crowd, as I would be delivering the keynote. To my surprise, one of the local iwi members informed me that because I had already been welcomed by the iwi and their ancestors, I would still participate in the Pōwhiri, but on the side of the hosting iwi. As the call-and-response began, I found myself awkwardly yet curiously singing in Te Reo Māori without skipping a beat, as if I had known those songs all along. To this day, there is no clear explanation as to how I was able to sing alongside the hosting

members. Near the end of the conference, the other two keynote speakers and I were asked to come to the front of the auditorium, where each of us was gifted an original painting by Māori artist Ephraim Russell, part of his *Te Aukaha* series. Each work was distinct, and the one I received was a representation of a white heron, or *Aztatl* in Nahuatl—a bird often associated with the migration stories of *Aztlán*—flying over the two islands of Aotearoa in the background. In my hosts' words, the painting was an acknowledgment of my (“world”) travels, a Xicano de *Aztlán*, as a rare bird among the Māori Peoples. Much like the *hongī*, it was the air, the shared element that breathes life into us all, that brought us together in the artist's rendering (fig. 1).

After the MASS conference concluded, I flew from the North Island to meet my colegas on the South Island. We first drove to Lake Wanaka for a weekend of hiking, mountain climbing, and camping before I was due to lead my master class at Otago University. As we neared the crest of the mountain trail, I beheld with wonder the sight before me: below was a large island in the middle of the bowl-like lake. I turned to my friend Mahdis and, feeling as Frantz Fanon did, “straddling Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep” (1967, 140). I was barely able to utter the words, “Any self-respecting Xicano would recognize that this is *Aztlán*!”

To be clear, I was not referring to the idea of raising a flag and staking claim to Aotearoa as a new Chicano nation-state, as would be the case if swayed by the epistemic and cartographic trappings of modernity/coloniality



Figure 1. Ephraim Russell, *Untitled*, 2014, from the *Te Aukaha* series, 1 of 3. Acrylic on canvas, 12 × 12 in. Image courtesy of Roberto D. Hernández.

and its privileging of the national-territorial state form. On the contrary, my claim then, as now, is that in the engaging of the face-to-face with the Māori relatives, according to their own geographies and calendars, epistemology, and ways of being, I encountered that space of Lake Wanaka as a sacred geography. The interface with it was of a recognition of the coming together of topographical features, the mountain in a bowl of water, a space that brings together all the necessary elements to sustain life itself. In this regard, Aztlán is a sacred geography that serves to reconstitute the deindigenized individual and collective selves. Here, it is necessary to turn to the work of Nahuatl maestro and elder Arturo Meza, whose contributions as a knowledge keeper and etymologist have led him to study both classical Nahuatl alongside the living language of Nahuatl speakers today who never lost their connection to the language and the various possible "worlds" extending from it. Following a presentation at the Centro Cultural de la Raza in San Diego, Meza noted that grammatically speaking, Aztlán as land of herons is a mistranslation, for such a place would be called Aztatlan. Instead, following the dropping of the *-tl* or *-tli* endings when combining words to create place names, Aztlán would likely derive from the base word *aztl* or *aztli* (tool, or wing of a bird, understood as the part that gives the whole its functionality). Thus, if we follow contemporary expressions of *-aztli*, as in *teponaztli*, or *cuahuizaztli*, *aztli*, or the place of *aztli* as Aztlán would more properly translate to the place of tools; that is, the place where we find the essential necessities for being, as in to live or to sustain life or livelihood of the People. Aztlán is that self-consciousness of ourselves as a people that comes in and through our relationship to the land, the water, the air, the fire and the sun; in short, our relationship to the sacred elements of life itself.

By Way of Conclusion and Caminos Yet to Be Walked

I would be remiss if I did not conclude this *autohistoria ethnographica* without mentioning my return trip to the North Island to see Hemi out in the bush. He wanted me to meet two Māori warriors involved in a land dispute over their sacred burial grounds, where developers were seeking rights to develop a beachfront hotel. Roputa was the political spokesperson, and Patariki, the more reserved of the two, was a respected spiritual leader. I spent about an hour conversing mostly with Roputa about the burial grounds at Whakatane, where the first *waka* (canoe) was said to have arrived unto the islands where the ocean meets the river. Patariki finally interjected, "Tell

me about your peoples, the Xicanos. We have heard about your nation and tried to learn what we can.” Caught slightly off-guard, I tried to recount centuries of deindigenization via coloniality as briefly as possible. Once we exchanged our goodbyes, Patariki called me over to his car. Without questioning our indigeneity, as has become increasingly a fad in US academic spaces, our final discussion reaffirmed a mutual recognition of each other, our peoples, and our ancestors as relatives. When I returned to the United States following this world-altering, world-affirming experience, I visited with a local elder and recounted my travels. His response: *Ya vez*, it is often other Indigenous peoples who are quicker to recognize us as Indigenous more than we recognize ourselves!

As Lugones posits, engaging with others not just as variations of the same but according to their own logics and principles is the basis for “world” traveling as a “skillful, creative, rich, enriching and . . . loving way of being and living” (2003, 77). We learn to love one another through a willingness and openness to travel to one another’s worlds, not as tourists but to see with humility and to see as they see and experience with their own flesh and bone. Lugones further points to the loving one, who knows that to be seen involves consulting others about what they see from their own world: starting point other! We must try to see their world in a loving and horizontal manner, as relatives on this floating rock in the galaxy. Traveling to other worlds enables us to simply be, through loving one another beyond the categorical a priori of political solidarities among colonial/racial subjects and also despite it. Let us remake our world into one in which we recognize the unity of all living beings, from the creepy crawlers to the four-legged, from the scaly swimmers to the winged, and everything in between, including the waters, trees, stonespeople, wind, rain, and sun that provide nourishment to the seeds that allow us to live in a good, sustainable way.

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On Becoming Chicano in Europe

John Rechy's Immanently Queer Latino Soldado Razo Flâneur in Paris, 1950–52

Michael A. Parra

When I was about 15, sexual urges started coming but without direction—men or women? My first male sexual contact was in the Army when I was about 20 in Paris, on leave. A lot of sexual conflicts came into play, a lot of ambiguity. Finally, I identified entirely as a Gay man.

—John Rechy

Parlez-vous français, Bato?

In John Rechy's episodic memoir, *About My Life and the Kept Woman* (2008), the author's strategic identitarian performances undergird a narrative about his global wanderings through closets, militarized cages, and cosmopolitan margins. Complicating the interstices of race, sexuality, and ontologies of space and mobility in Latina/o/x studies, Rechy's work deploys a model of flânerie self-fashioning to explicate the nuanced life experiences of a white-passing and hypermasculine American male who navigates his saliently gay and equally sublimated Chicano identity in 1950s France. His memoir thereby illuminates an ironic yet constitutive globalization of Chicanidad that has always been part of Chicana/o/x self-fashioning and broader ontological meditations, even as this global dimension remains underexplored and undertheorized. For Rechy, supra-US venues such as Paris—which he visits as a US Army 101st Airborne Division infantryman from 1950 to 1952, at the dawn of the Korean War—enable further exploration of the convoluted nature of his double coming out as gay and Chicano. Significantly, although Rechy maintains a racial and sexual anonymity while in Europe, passing, here and elsewhere, becomes a methodology that is part of a multilayered coming-out performance to reclaim his unique

space as a gay Chicano in the United States, albeit with profound ambivalence toward both categories—an attitude that continued throughout much of his life and is reflected in the scholarly treatment of him.

Ironically, if not for Rechy's sojourn in Paris, the Chicano, gay, and Chicano gay canons may never have been able to claim him in their localized galleries. Complicating his incorporation into the Chicana/o/x literary canon, Rechy never refers to himself as Chicano in his memoir. And the tone he uses to distinguish his mother as "Mexican" ("my mother is Mexican"; 2008, 99, 115) seems more intent on deferring this racialized otherness onto her while overemphasizing his Americanness throughout the book. One such incident occurs during an encounter with US Border Patrol agents who comment, "Thought you was a wet-back, sonny" (150). Rechy, shirtless from swimming in the Rio Grande, states, "I'm American" (150). At a time when being "Mexican" and queerness were seen as the antithesis of Americanness, which was punctuated by formal segregation and legal statutes outlawing homosexuality, Europe would become epiphanic in Rechy's multilayered *concientización*, or coming to consciousness about his racialized gay identity. His rendering of this process presents important opportunities to meditate on what leads someone to identify as Chicana/o/x.

This geopolitical and personal mobility and transformation, however, is never fully complete or without lingering contradictions and complications. In an interview with Debra Castillo, Rechy expresses his dislike of the word *gay* while also refusing to associate himself with *queer* in representations of his authorship. To him, such labels have the potential to restrict readership (Castillo and Rechy 1995; cited in Bost 2019). As critics situate his corpus and corporeality into various canons—gay, Chicano, regional American, among others—Rechy's memoir ultimately sheds light on an individual who empirically resists any typological labeling even as he becomes an acclaimed gay Chicano author. Challenging conventional enunciations of Chicanidad, his rendezvous in Paris provides a unique shift in Chicana/o/x

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loci of enunciation that have the potential to offer new insights into the complexities of the local-global dialectic in Chicana/o/x identity formation.

Responding to Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez's imperative "for in-depth work in the histories and creative life strategies of gay Chicano and Latino men" (Hames-García and Martínez 2011, 6), this essay focuses on Rechy's expression of a gay Chicano subjectivity in spaces not marked as explicitly gay or Chicano. Nomenclature is among the most contested aspects of Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies, and I am choosing to identify Rechy as "Chicano" for specific reasons. First, he grapples with a borderland, working-class politics, even as he gains critical acclaim and is not necessarily associated with the politics of the Chicana/o movement. Second, I am reclaiming "Chicano man" in my reading of Rechy as part of a critical masculinities study that reexamines homosocial relations between closeted cis men and their heterosexual counterparts. Gayzing from, through, and outside the closet, such a recovery then forces one to recognize gay Chicano and Latino men as men, because sexual and gender expressions should not impact their male subjectivity or be read as "x" for the sake of inclusivity.¹ Furthermore, this excavation operates simultaneously to and as part of the larger effort that decenters the cis heterosexual male as the primary enunciation of what it means to be a "man." It is precisely this task that then allows for a multiplicity in the expressions and manifestations of masculinity to flourish and, most important, to hold space within the complexities of male identity formation as racialized, gendered, and sexualized.

Throughout his memoir, Rechy's obsession with the two "kept" women of the title provides him with the imaginary space to postulate what life could be like beyond the closet. The first "kept" woman is Marisa Guzman, Rechy's sister-in-law, who has been living in exile, disowned by her father for being the mistress of Augusto de Leon, a prominent Mexican politician. Rechy becomes infatuated with the memory of Marisa smoking a cigarette, fingering the hem of her extravagant dress, and, potentially, smiling at him: she "smiled, definitely smiled, this time," he notes (2008, 29). The other "kept" woman is Rechy's high school classmate Isabel Franklin, whose real name is Alicia Isabel Gonzales. After making plans to go on a date with her, Rechy hears gossip from his sister Olga about Alicia Isabel's true identity: she uses her Anglicized surname as a coping mechanism to move away from the intense bigotries of her borderlands roots in El Paso, Texas (2008, 61). Occupying both material and imaginary spaces, Rechy's memory and the community's gossip are crucial to keeping these "kept" women present despite their physical absence. Noting that Rechy "[recalls] their beauty

and [reflects] on their exile,” Suzanne Bost proposes that Marisa and Alicia Isabel symbolize individuals who sacrifice an original identity “[to] achieve wealth and glamor” and tie themselves “to men who support their created identities” (2019, 48). She adds that Rechy is like Marisa and Alicia Isabel because he “[leaves] his hetero-patriarchal family behind to achieve fame and success by passing within and writing about queer underworlds that his family would never understand” (48).

However, simply associating Rechy’s likeness with these “kept” women does not account for the singularity embedded in the title. Alongside coming to terms with his gay borderlands identity, he has recurring fantasies about Marisa and Alicia Isabel, with a particular interest in their assertiveness in forging their paths to glamour and wealth through racial and class shape-shifting. They soothe Rechy’s anxiety and guilt as he embarks on his own racial and sexual passings and immanent self-fashioning outside his multiple closets. Specifically, these two women also provide Rechy with a palpable model for reimagining and refashioning his figural drag performance as the “Kept Woman” in Paris, which he seeks to fashion as empowering, albeit as a still-ambivalent, white-passing gay Chicano. In flâneur fashion, his passing enables him to navigate the closets, as well as the military cages and outsider positionings, pursuant to a gradual coming out as a complex globalized—yet always already local—subject of history.

Gayzing from the Closet

John Francisco Rechy was born in El Paso on March 10, 1931, one of five children of Guadalupe Flores and Roberto Sixto Rechy. Of Mexican Scottish heritage, Rechy read as a *güero*, or “Mexican who didn’t look Mexican by entrenched standards,” as he states in *About My Life* (2008, 38). His fair skin, blondish hair, and blue eyes allowed him to avoid intense racial stigma before the civil rights movement, a time when “No Dogs, Negroes, or Mexicans” signs and anti-Mexican sentiment were ubiquitous in the Southwest (Maese-Cohen 2014). Growing up impoverished “one block into the North Side” of El Paso, Rechy attended El Paso High School (the “American school” as he notes; 2008, 49) instead of Bowie High (the “Mexican school”), which was “where the poorest children from [the] South [side] went” (49). Leveraging his ability to cross racial and class lines, Rechy succeeded in establishing a semblance of relationality with the popular “rich Anglo” students, all the while feeling “fraudulent” (50). Such racial and class passings also became central to life as a student

at Texas Western College, where he received a BA in English literature in 1950. At age nineteen, Rechy enlisted in the US Army. His two older brothers were World War II veterans: "Robert, the older of the two, in the South Pacific; and Yvan, the younger, in Germany" (2–3). As a young man both uncomfortable with and unaware of his own burgeoning racial and sexual identity, the hypermasculinist, homophobic, and racist ideologies of the US Army in the 1950s created an environment that allowed Rechy to continue obfuscating his dissonance and avoid confronting his self. Indeed, the discursive apparatus of the military became a mechanism for Rechy to solidify a hypermasculinist persona that masked an immanently gay identity. Ironically, it was this persona—the cocky paratrooper with the bulbous phallic sparkling jump boots—that brought Rechy toward the epiphanic self-discovery through which literary critics came to recognize the gay Chicano icon he is today.

Through his queering of the US Army, as it were, Rechy expands the salience of the US military as a vehicle for the empowerment of Mexicans, as Mexican Americans were more commonly known in the era, aside from epithets. Significantly, he queers the Soldado Razo long before other documented cases of LGBTQIA+ Soldado Razos (Olguín 2002; Rincón 2017; Vigil 2014). Despite confessing his hatred for the US Army, Rechy's deployment to Germany in his early twenties affords him the opportunity to leave a "home" that encompasses the ascriptive ideologies chaining his identity to multiple iterations and valences of the closet. In transit after being deployed, he wanders through Frankfurt, Fulda, Berchtesgaden, and back to Fulda, all the while dressed in an airborne infantry uniform that functions as a form of drag in reverse, which inevitably brings him into contact with other hypermasculinist men who also share his burgeoning homosocial and homosexual desires. Serving as a low-rank private assigned to staff in a colonel's office, Rechy eventually earns ten days of leave and flees to Paris, where he stays a total of seventeen days that ultimately will change his life.

In quintessential flâneur fashion, Rechy finds himself reaching the outskirts of Paris's cosmopolitanism, a space he presciently describes as "grown dark" (2008, 191). He stumbles upon a party where young men and women are dancing. His observation that some were "tipsy" gives him an excuse in the event that something sexually charged might occur as everyone's judgment is impaired (191). Nourishing his still-evolving gendered and sexualized identity and desires, a female figure draws Rechy to join in the dance, then fades away, leaving him with another man. Experiencing this

homosocial and immanently homosexual encounter beyond the United States, the significance of “moving together and laughing” marks the first instance where the distance between Rechy and another man ceases to exist (191). Evading criminal punishment for going AWOL in Paris, Rechy serves a new assignment in Frankfurt, then leaves the Army and attends graduate school on the GI Bill (197).

Once discharged, Rechy goes to Dallas and stays at the YMCA for a few days before returning to El Paso. Looking to distance himself from his years in the service, he finds himself surrounded by naked and half-naked men on the sundeck (201). As his first US cruising experience, Dallas becomes linked with Paris as a site where Rechy wanders the margins, teasing unnamed men (195, 201). He then foreshadows his eventual life as a hustler, cruising cosmopolitan and rural spaces not yet menaced by the HIV pandemic. He ponders, “I had taken another step into the tempting world of men, only men. What essential step was next before I joined it?” (201). Paris and Dallas thus bridge his transformations in the metropolitan centers of the country, specifically New York City and Los Angeles. Indeed, these *flânerie* wanderings make him (in)famous; however, the process of Rechy’s multilayering coming out is long and drawn out.

Rechy travels to New York with the intent to enroll at Columbia University, and in the process discovers the “world of Times Square,” where he “would invade the streets and live within their world eagerly” (Rechy 1963, 15). This space anchors his oeuvre, featuring first his young self as a male prostitute and later his yearnings for this time in *City of Night* (1963), *Numbers* (1967), and *Sexual Outlaw* (1977). But Paris had set the stage for this performance, with the sojourn in Dallas serving as a bookend to his global and highly mobile cruising toward a new synthesis. Significantly, for a substantial part of his life, this new synthesis had no formal name or category that he could or would claim as validating.

In his vacillating and, indeed, *flâneuresque* positions on nomenclature, Rechy has expressed resentment at not being considered a “real ‘Chicano writer’” (Bost 2019, 53). Yet, ironically, he had been recognized as one since the early 1970s (Bruce-Novoa 1986; Giles 1974; Saldívar 1997). Sixty years after his debut novel, *City of Night*, there is no questioning Rechy’s contribution to the Chicano canon as an early gay Latino male writer, as noted by Hames-García and Martínez (2011). However, to date, no one has explored how Rechy’s long, circuitous route to acceptance as a Chicano, and specifically a gay Chicano author worthy of canonization, begins in Europe and continues to spaces such as New York City that are far outside

the conventional understanding of Chicano spaces at the time. This mobility, I believe, reminds us of the fluid spatialization of Chicano—and broader Chicana/o/x—ontology that challenges earlier iterations of Chicana/o/x spatial studies by Mary Pat Brady (2002), Raúl Homero Villa (2000), and others who variously have figured the US-Mexico borderlands and the barrio as the axis mundi of Chicanidades in general and LGBTQIA+ Chicanidades as well.

Supplementing El Paso, Paris, Dallas, and New York in Rechy's mobile coming out, Germany represents a space where his borderlands subjectivity crystallizes within a military cage and the securitization of an Army uniform, which he describes as "olive pants bloused over boots, Eisenhower jacket with the Screaming Eagle emblem, a sky-blue scarf, blue-bordered cap" (2008, 178). As noted, this uniform enables Rechy's cross-dressing, as it were; however, in Paris he is met with an "excitement [for] a new world of freedom, in another country, away from the army" (190). Upon arriving in Paris, Rechy quickly changes out of that straight male and heteropatriarchal drag and into something more comfortable: a pair of Levi jeans and T-shirt that his older brother sends from El Paso (189). In this transported borderlands drag, he strolls through Paris's cosmopolitan world, free from the military cages that kept his identity closeted. He is misrecognized repeatedly and in specifically racialized and sexualized ways. For instance, Rechy recounts an American tourist asking him for directions in "mangled French": "That pleased me, because, looking around, I saw so many wondrous beautiful people" (190). Encountering this American tourist who treats him *as if* he is Parisian, Rechy successfully establishes an otherworldly relationality that goes beyond the physical and social geography of US borderlands. That is, it is his passings, crossings, receptions, and rejections in Europe that set the stage for his queer globalization of Chicanidad.

Rechy's global passing also allows him to read as un-American and assists with radically transforming his queer flâneur self beyond the multispatial forms of confinement in the postwar United States. During this time, it should be noted, Paris was gaining a metonymic, almost mythic status for gay male American writers, including James Baldwin, whose relocation to the city set the foundation for *Giovanni's Room* (1956). Like Rechy's memoir, Baldwin sets forth a bildungsroman of a white-passing American (albeit fictional) who comes to terms with his sexuality while occupying the cosmopolitan margins in Paris—complicating the interstices of race, gender, and sexuality in African American literary and cultural traditions. Paris also was the site of exile and self-exile for intellectuals from the 1920s

through the 1970s, which led to important countercultural syntheses and various counterhegemonic political praxes.

Paris becomes a site of liberation where Rechy engages clothing as a radical novelty to self-fashion, quite literally, as a cosmopolite away from the racist, segregated, and homophobic United States and its army. He uses the city to escape the choreographed identity in Germany, especially, and as a site that goes beyond the material and linguistic borderlands of his native country. He does so by reclaiming the controversial figure of the hypermasculinist flâneur. The flâneur is generally the idle man-about-town and is often associated with Charles Baudelaire's ire and Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. However, even in these and other provocative readings of the flâneur as self-fashioning and anonymous, this figure has not been queered. Yet, for Rechy, the flâneur enables him to refashion his self as a permutation of the "kept" woman paradigm, albeit the one he remembers from his youth, in which these scorned women had broken free of their heteropatriarchal cage. Rechy's flâneur represents his queer desires for unrestrictive wandering, exploring, and becoming.

I argue that Rechy queers and racializes this otherwise decadent and quintessentially European figure to actualize a new identity. Combining the practice of relationality with acts of self-fashioning and the flâneur's strolling, Rechy becomes a flâneur agent who is radically different from the heteropatriarchal European flâneur, who is most known as an alienated urban spectator wandering through the capitalist milieu (Birkerts 1982). The flânerie Rechy embodies brings forth what he subconsciously treats as the "me" who is not "myself," who threatens him with a haunting awareness that "something ineffable [is] about to happen here, in [Paris]" (2008, 190). Finding himself penetrating in and out of closets, militarized cages, and cosmopolitan outskirts, Rechy's cruising flânerie in Paris highlights the possibilities for an immanently queer global borderlands subjectivity—the abject yet defiantly proud but still somewhat ambivalent gay Chicano from Texas . . . and the world.

The Diasporic Queering of the Flâneur

As a global borderlands subject wandering back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean and throughout US and European cities, Rechy's flâneur is shaped by the commodity culture in the US Southwest after the Great Depression and before the civil rights era. Extending the flâneur to underclass, racialized contexts, Shane Vogel engages with the idea of self-making by taking

up Harlem's nightclubs as sites for testing society's racial and sexual limits. Vogel declares that the "cabaret scene . . . played a key role in the Harlem Renaissance by offering an alternative to politics of sexual respectability and racial uplift that sought to dictate the proper subject matter for black arts and letters" (2009, 29). Exploring nightlife performance to understand the racial and sexual politics of the early twentieth century, the flâneur becomes a crucial symbol for demystifying African American flânerie (150). From a "rural street life before northward migration" to the "modern mapping of the metropolis," Vogel sees the genealogy of flânerie as an African American act of relationality, as a practice that is void of the anonymity that a European conceptualization of the flâneur promises (150). Expanding on Vogel, I recognize Rechy's flâneur queerness as disrupting heteropatriarchal but also nationalist—including Chicana/o/x cultural nationalist— notions of race and sexuality that enable him to reinvent his identity, especially as it pertains to the abjection projected onto him in the US borderlands and in general.

While scholars usually focus on Rechy's hyperlocal queer cruising through US rural and cosmopolitan spaces, they fail to recognize the importance of Paris as a site in a local-global dialectic of queer coming out and supra-Chicano identity formation. This creates a narrow reading of Rechy's gay identity as distinctly American when, in fact, he first performs a closeted queerness while establishing an otherworldly relationality with people in 1950s Paris, as argued above. Rechy's clothes, skin, hair, eyes, and temporary discarding of his US Army uniform visibly render him un-American and unrecognizable by the American tourist, enabling him to achieve a global passing *as if* he were Parisian. This pleases him and intertwines with fantasies of the "kept" women, with whom he identifies precisely because of their confidence and performance, which mirror his own gay borderlands subjectivity. Unknowingly, this links his corporeality to the wave of Americans frequenting gay bars and cafes in 1950s Paris. These multilayering relationalities contextualize the juggling act Rechy masochistically endures in order to effect his global passing. Marcelle Maese-Cohen contextualizes the migratory nature of Rechy's work by engaging the "untold narrative of movement that is paradoxically the story of stasis and segregation" and by introducing the El Paso "I": "a borderland subjectivity and narrator who attempt to historicize North-South patterns of migration, racialization, diaspora, and empire of *América*, with an accent" (2014, 88). The El Paso "I" harbors the "[desire] to escape the migrant home because it signifies . . . not the trajectory of movement, upward mobility, or shifting national consciousness, but the indoctrinated logic of entrapment

and racial segregation” (95). If the El Paso “I” intends to seek relationality, then it will incorporate a *flânerie* that exposes Rechy’s empirical positionality as the opposite of that of his father and brothers. It is important to note Maese-Cohen’s imperative in order to perceive the untold narratives of borderland abjectness. This then allows for a reading of Rechy’s queer performance in Paris as not odd, ironic, or unexpected but as fundamentally necessary for him, at least in this era.

Dragging the El Paso “I” across the Atlantic, Rechy complicates the understanding of borderland subjectivity by historicizing diasporic trends from América to Europe. Diaspora is “a process [that] is always in the making, and . . . a condition [that] is situated within [a] global race and gender hierarchies” (Patterson and Kelley 2000, 11). One could lean toward coding Rechy’s diasporic movement as expatriating, but he never settles down in one specific location or becomes a resident beyond the United States. Rather, even after his discharge, Rechy’s queer diasporic imaginings allow him to occupy multispatial globalities, especially once Paris becomes central to the genealogy of his sexual identity. As both a process and condition, the use of diaspora highlights migration patterns and identity formations as empirically evolving and not lodged in a spatial and temporal stasis. Drawing on Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley’s notion of queer diaspora, Rechy, as a closeted passing figure, complicates queer theory paradigms and reinforces the need to “start with explicit formulations of racialized sexuality and sexualized race” (Tinsley 2008, 205). Materializing a queer diasporic imaginary, *About My Life and the Kept Woman* encapsulates “the creative domain of the displaced subject’s imagination and [his] . . . ability to perceive, interpret, and reimagine the world from a diasporic lens” (Clitandre 2018, 2). Rechy’s El Paso “I” goes beyond the confinements of América with a *flânerie* movement across the Atlantic that incorporates an oceanic fluidity to his queer diasporic performance throughout the world.

Mask for Mask

While a return may mark the end of a material diaspora, Paris becomes central to Rechy’s queer imaginary that accompanies his diasporic performance through rural and cosmopolitan spaces in a pre-HIV pandemic United States. Examining a “Europe-inflected supra-Chicanidades,” B. V. Olguín challenges “conventional Chicax studies paradigms” that “confine Chicanidad to the Americas” by highlighting “Spain and other parts of Europe” as constituting “a growing and virtually ignored discrepant archive” (2021, 19). Decentering

the Americas as a principal locus of enunciation for Chicana/o/x identity, I argue that Rechy's author/narrator "I" complicates disciplinary paradigms by detailing the process for coming out as gay and ambivalently Chicano while casually cruising the cosmopolitan outskirts of 1950s Paris. Empirically slipping away from any attempt to entrench his racial, gender, and sexual identity, he provides an in-depth account of passing identity that responds directly to the ascriptive ideologies that permeate migrant home narratives.

Moreover, Rechy historicizes queer borderlands migration patterns and diasporic performances from América to Europe—from the colony that now colonizes to the previous monocolonial geographic space. Roberto D. Hernández, co-founder of the seminar series Decolonial Dialogues, underscores the importance of going back to Spain, and, more broadly, Europe because it provides a way to unsettle "founding fictions of the monocolonial world" that simultaneously forces the Americas to be excavated as a heterogeneous space (quoted in Olguín 2021, 33). This allows for "stable concepts and categories . . . of race [and] also nation-states" to be seen for what they are: "historical constructions that have a very specific racial colonial history" (33). Challenging transnational paradigms and academic disciplinary practices that focus solely on the question of identity, Rechy's memoir further decenters the United States and Aztlán as root enunciations for his gay and ambivalently Chicano identity. Paris is a site where Rechy's queer diasporic imaginary materializes life beyond the closet. Through the drag fantasies of the kept woman, Rechy's flâneur is that of a diasporic borderlands identity sauntering through cosmopolitan spaces with ultimate anonymity. From mask to mask, he becomes made and unmade through moments of completeness that are empirically met with incompleteness. Treating identity as a palimpsest, Rechy ultimately articulates how queer diasporic identity is a process and condition while navigating within and beyond the material and linguistic outskirts of a given space—be it El Paso, San Antonio, Morganfield, Frankfurt, Fulda, Berchtesgaden, Paris, Frankfurt, Dallas, El Paso, New York, Los Angeles, and so on.

Notes

1. Epigraph: Quoted in Eric Andrews-Katz, "John Rechy: From Bedsheets to Printed Sheets: A Candid Conversation with the Author of *City of Night*," *Seattle Gay News* 41, no. 28 (2013).

2. I am putting my position in alignment with Richard T. Rodríguez's article "X Marks the Spot" (2017).

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the-Mex-is

Guillermo del Toro's *Silver Angel* versus *The Strain* (of the Political Economy of Vampirism)

Amy Sara Carroll

In “*Cronos* and the Political Economy of Vampirism: Notes on a Historical Constellation” (1998), John Kraniauskas argues that Guillermo del Toro’s first film, *Cronos* (1993), syncs the watch of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to that of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, offering a site-specific yet expansive critique of late capitalism as “symbolic cannibalism,” consistent with a European vampire lore that is obsessed with decadent aristocracy (reanimated in an AIDS imaginary) and attention to the horrors of (neo)colonial encounter across the Americas. Following Kraniauskas, in this set of notes on historical reconstellation, I approach del Toro’s collaboratively authored and diverging project *The Strain*—which comprises a trilogy of novels (2009, 2010, and 2011), a six-volume series of comics (2012–15), and a television series on FX that ran for four seasons (2014–17)—as a collective portrait of the strain of the political economy of vampirism between the event horizons of the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City’s Twin Towers and the 2020 global proliferation of COVID-19. Concomitantly, I contend that three characters—Gus and Guadalupe Elizalde and Ángel Guzmán Hurtado, aka “the Silver Angel”—stand in for a Greater-Mexicanidad-becoming-global-Latinidades, approximating the supra-Latinx by way of the transnationally campy/rasquache. Scrambling the word “methexis”—historically understood as theatrical “group sharing”—into the particularity of “the-Mex-is,” the characters’ appearance performs a proxy antidote to *The Strain*’s hyperbolic representations of class conflict, racial inequality, genocide, contagion, and eco-catastrophe. Their uncanny (home/not-home) presence reminds

us that cognitive mapping cannot be decoupled from cognitive kinship diagramming while also triggering the waking dream of a (brown) commons.

Posthumanity

Cronos opens in 1536 in Veracruz, Mexico. Alchemist Umberto Fulcanelli, official watchmaker of the viceroy of New Spain, traps a blood-sucking insect inside a golden obelisk of his creation—the Cronos device. Fast-forward 450 years to a global Mexico City: Dieter de la Guardia, a wealthy, aging, and infirm industrialist, dispatches his bungling nephew Ángel to Jesús Gris's antiques shop in search of Fulcanelli's invention, which Gris has discovered hidden in an archangel statue. The ensuing struggle for control of the Cronos device, which grants immortality to anyone who possessed it, results in the accidental vampirization of Gris, the demise of both de la Guardias, and Gris's eventual self-sacrifice in the name of his granddaughter Aurora.

Writing of the significance of Aurora's name ("dawn") vis-à-vis the disappeared of Latin America's "dirty wars," Kraniauskas observes in a revised version of his notes that "Aurora's identification with Jesús, the father of her father, is . . . a suture in which the symbolic order, rather than being mended, is scarred in the violent attempt of recovery from the 'coup.' . . . One might say that *Cronos* is also an Argentine film; or that at least, with its leading actor . . . it [inscribes] itself within the recent experience of the region's 'savage' capitalism" (2017, 161). Paradoxically, Kraniauskas's—or, better put, del Toro's—attentions to the literal and the allegorical, to genealogy and geography in the wake of growing later capitalism in the Southern Cone in the 1970s, anticipate the spectacular multiplication of (re)production across *The Strain's* portrayal of another city also in the periodizing throes of socioeconomic restructuring.

Explicitly invoking Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in particular the novel's opening representation of the docking of a ghost ship in London's harbor, as well as the September 11, 2001, paradigm-shifting weaponization of aircraft, *The Strain*, across all of its written and visual forms, begins with a Regis Airlines Boeing 777-2 LR arriving at John F. Kennedy Airport (JFK) from Berlin. On the runway, the flight suddenly goes offline. The FBI and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are called in to

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investigate a “possible terrorist attack.” After two CDC epidemiologists, Ephraim Goodweather and Nora Martínez, board the aircraft, they pronounce all but four of its passengers and crew members dead. Holocaust survivor, vampire hunter, and professor turned East Harlem pawnbroker Abraham Setrakian recognizes this (un)natural disaster as the work of one particular faction of the fallen vampiric creatures known as *strigoi* (a term culled from Eastern European folklore that refers to an ancient being who drinks human blood) and the wealthy 1 percent. Despite Setrakian’s dire warnings, the scientists insist on treating the situation as an “infectious event.” The dead and the living are quarantined. A mysterious virus has infected their bodies via a worm pathogen, causing them to lose and gain organs, nervous systems, and modes of (social) reproduction. The victims awaken as a collective intellect, or hive mind, coordinated by the “Master.” Each of the infected carries a “homing device,” the muscle memory of their “Dear Ones.”

Obvious parallels exist between *Cronos* and *The Strain*, as if the latter were an expansion of the former: Gris owns an antiques store; Setrakian owns a pawn shop. Eldritch Palmer, wealthy, aging, and infirm like Dieter de la Guardia, seeks eternal life by way of “something old,” meaning the sting of the *strigoi*, whose ancient history is detailed most clearly in the original trilogy of novels. Still, while both *Cronos* and *The Strain* are attentive to the flows of transnational capital, *The Strain* more emphatically than *Cronos* foregrounds class as a structural -ism, ready-made for monstrous manipulation. The vampire as predator overpopulates literally and metaphorically *The Strain*’s variants, which riff on Karl Marx’s representations of primitive accumulation by way of vampiric figuration (think *Capital*).

De la Guardia’s disregard for the welfare of others pales in comparison to Palmer’s willingness to sacrifice an entire city and planet. Short of eternal life, Palmer courts access to the racially coded “white”—what the Master sparingly supplies to keep Palmer’s ailments at bay. More systematically than *Cronos*, *The Strain* eerily anticipates the acceleration of “savage neoliberalism” after the Americas’ twinned 9/11s, when a councilman’s rhetorical question to Palmer—“Pure ‘Shock Doctrine,’ is it not?”—juxtaposes a much-cited reference to post-9/11 (1973) Chile (taken up Naomi Klein in her eponymous text *The Shock Doctrine*), local and global socioeconomic restructuring post-9/11 (2001), and the trilogy’s chronicling of the outbreak of vampire capitalism also fanning out from the so-called “capital of finance” (del Toro and Hogan 2010, 181). The Master nests deep in the wound-womb beneath the Twin Towers’ former site and engineers a nuclear

winter to facilitate an “eternal night” (the better for his progeny to roam freely). Yet, at the twilight of the Anthropocene, the *longue durée* of the backstory eclipses even Palmer’s sellout of humanity.

Absent the elegance of *Dracula* or *Capital*, *The Strain* appeals first to a baser materialism grounded in biblical exegesis. In the novel trilogy, the Master, outed as the fallen archangel Ozryel, refuses to feed discreetly according to the code of conduct established by a council of Ancients, a cabal of strigoi who for millennia have controlled bloodletting and regulated (human) capital to amass a varied portfolio of wealth, resources, and contacts. In the FX series and the comics, viewers are spared the didacticism—and homophobia—of the trilogy’s esoteric catechism and are afforded glimmers of the tantalizing possibility of (re)reading the series’ representations of the “political economy of vampirism” as Eighteenth Brumairishly tragicomic.

The Master is identified only as the youngest of the seven original vampires. Across *The Strain*’s variants, “he” [sic] infects, in effect procreating equally sexless strigoi. The character’s fecundity necessitates an optimization of the Fordist assembly line: animal-processing plants where blood is harvested in a portrait of extractivist capitalism qua bare life. The rhizomatic structure of total domination in *The Strain* quickly overtakes *Cronos*’s investments in the arboreal. For better or worse, the special affect—the sensation of a reconfiguration of timespace as both palimpsestic and aleatory—anticipates the acceleration of the transition from a privileging of the “family tree” as concept to variations on the “familiar”: de- and reterritorialization cannot be disentangled from *The Strain*’s multivalent regeneration of relationality; cognitive mapping and cognitive kinship diagramming become one and the same.

Method and media portrayed in turn dictate the forms of *The Strain*’s own production. After no network showed interest in developing their idea for television, del Toro and Hogan co-wrote the original trilogy of novels. Others subsequently wrote and drew the comics and directed and produced the FX episodes in consultation with del Toro. Part detective and contagion procedural, part hyper-citational restaging of vampire lore (within the latter’s own supra- tradition of citation), part political commentary, part allegory of worst breakup-and-custody battle ever, *The Strain* also is a meta-hybridization of del Toro’s career to date. Beyond *Cronos*, it shares similarities with the films *Mimic* (1997), in which a cockroach plague and subway underworlds haunt New York’s underclass; *Blade II* (2002), in which a plague gives rise to vampires with jaws and

stingers identical to those of the strigoi while an African American human-vampire hybrid takes on a vampire multinational biotech conglomerate; and *Hellboy* (2004), in which a New York “misfit” ostracized for his appearance and working-class bravado co-saves the planet. *The Strain* follows and anticipates the director’s repeated forays into co-authorship (novels, stories, sketchbooks, and storyboards); reinforces his preoccupation with corruption, fascism, love, and good versus evil; and reflects his allegiances to myriad literary and cinematic genres, from fairy tales to kaiju blockbusters. Concretely, the FX series supplied key sets for del Toro’s film *The Shape of Water* (2018).

As the strigoi multiply, a bloc of characters—sans their “Jesús Gris” (“gray Jesus”)—shifts into survivalist mode, tracks and remakes kinship in accordance with and in opposition to the planet’s accelerated transition into a free (meat) market. Setrakian, Goodweather, and Martínez, having uneasily reconciled their varied backgrounds and commitments to the theological, mythopoetic, and epidemiological, team up to contact trace. Across *The Strain*’s “strains,” time fractures between characters’ intersecting storylines. Shifts in perspective are marked by exact addresses, sometimes corresponding to actual locations in the city or elsewhere, already coded socioeconomically. Simultaneously, Setrakian, Goodweather, and Martínez fight *The Strain*’s iterative overreliance on archetype and stereotype, which produces so many Wynterian “genres” of the human (and the posthuman). But the project’s strained “political economy of vampirism” does not stop at the distinction between human and strigoi. The project is also at pains to distinguish between three groups: the strigoi masses whose members function like worker “zompires,” a cross between zombies and vampires; the aforementioned Ancients, who can see through these zompires’ eyes; and the strigoi elite whom the Ancients endow with higher intelligence and free will.

In this register, Thomas Eichhorst, the Master’s right-hand “Man” and a former Nazi commander at Treblinka (where he first met Setrakian), excels at embodying toxic transhistorical white masculinity; he is always ready to capitalize on preexisting socioeconomic conditions. Eichhorst hires Agustín “Gus” Elizalde, recently released from juvenile detention, to drive the Master’s coffin from JFK to the island of Manhattan. Elizalde and Eichhorst’s transaction hinges on a crucial recycled detail of the vampire narrative: the Master requires human assistance to travel across water. It also epitomizes *The Strain*’s recycling of stereotypes and archetypes, aka reified categories.

More focused on making ends meet than on adhering to the terms of his probation, Elizalde agrees, not knowing the cost of Eichhorst's request. The young man is coerced into accepting follow-up work when Eichhorst offers a path to US citizenship for his undocumented mother. Every bit a composite sketch, Guadalupe Elizalde is portrayed as a working-poor immigrant, a hospital aide, a survivor of domestic abuse, a tenant in Spanish Harlem who is perpetually behind on rent, and a single mother and sole provider for Gus and his older brother, Crispín. The FX series goes so far as to typecast the character as the devoted but suffering, extradiegetic Mexican mother, exceeding the parameters of the franchise by way of the actress Adriana Barraza's stature across media platforms as a meta-signifier of the Latinx or Latinx American caregiver. (Compare her work in the films *Amores Perros* [2001] and *Babel* [2006], both directed by del Toro's compatriot Alejandro G. Iñárritu.) Crispín is all stereotype too—a gang member, convicted felon, and addict who stole a clock from Setrakian's pawn shop that he gifts to his mother. Gus first comes to Setrakian's attention when he returns the merchandise, dissolving any theoretical obligation of the family to the pawnbroker. Setrakian and Gus's meeting marks the beginning of another kind of turning—Elizalde's—staged via the equally stereotypical “racial script” of the redemption narrative.

A battle soon wages for Gus's skills set. Everything that landed him in “juvie”—his “impulsive” (read quick) thinking, his “aggression” (read invincible drive for self-preservation)—serves to the youth's advantage in the series' apocalyptic new normal. Elizalde becomes an intrepid vampire slayer. Just as Eichhorst seeks to enlist the character, the Ancients solicit Gus's services to “*massacre the unclean*” (del Toro and Hogan 2010, 51, emphasis in original). A few beats ahead of the ask, Elizalde preemptively flips the encounter, and by extension the frame of *The Strain*, on its head: “What is this? . . . You thinking you're eating Mexican tonight?” (49). His fighting words open onto the clearing of a Greater-Mexican-becoming-global Latinx, always already overdetermined as working poor, and remake the affective register of the series as a whole. Against a wall of white strigoi, Elizalde insists on being read as brown.

The humor of the character's self-identification, signaling *The Strain's* proto-articulation of a supra-Latinidad (in lieu of but also in sync with stereotype), comes into sharpest relief when considered relationally. Krniauskas's observation that *Cronos* is as much an Argentine film as it is a Mexican film—“trans-Latin American”—is the beginning, not the end, of the argument. Although *Cronos* is set in Mexico, none of its protagonists

ostensibly is Mexican (the strongest case could be made for Aurora, whose age seemingly affords her the possibility of multinational identification). From Fulcanelli to Gris to de la Guardia, *Cronos* teems with (neo)colonialists and exiles. In fact, save for Ramón Morales in *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* (2019), Claire Maria Nuñez in *Trollhunters: Tales of Arcadia* (2016–18), and Martínez, Elizalde, and Guzmán Hurtado in *The Strain*, few Mexican or Latinx leads populate del Toro's worlds. From this vantage point, Elizalde's fierce apostrophe becomes all the more noteworthy as a harbinger of multivalent past and future cognitive kinship diagramming.

On the one hand, *The Strain*'s staging of a Greater-Mexicanidad-becoming-global-Latinidades in and through Gus and his mother cannot be compared to the upper-(middle)-class cosmopolitanism of Gris or de la Guardia in *Cronos*. Their embodiment of a global Latinidad stands apart from Martínez's talented-tenth, *Cronos*-like articulation of Latin American diaspora too. Consider Gus and Martínez's first meeting; the pair's class and educational differences on full display re-stage an opposition of Mexico and Argentina. On the other hand, the Elizaldes' double figuration as linked vampire slayer and maternal vampire becomes all the more intelligible by way of the "immaterial labor" of a third *Strain* character also typecast as metonymic of a Greater-Mexican-becoming-global Latinx.

Ozryel versus the Silver Angel

Across *The Strain*'s variants, Gus and Guadalupe Elizalde are triangulated by a guardian angel distinct from *Cronos*'s Ángel de la Guardia. Volume 3, *The Fall*, of *The Strain*'s comics series includes a three-part supplement, "The Silver Angel" (Lapham 2014), which introduces the dishwasher and supposedly washed-up wrestler Ángel Guzmán Hurtado. It also acts as an homage to the *historieta*. Framed by Guzmán Hurtado's discomfort with the company that Elizalde keeps—a band of former gang members turned mercenary vampire slayers—part 1 of "The Silver Angel" moves from the boredom of imposed lockdown (during which time Gus's business associates watch football reruns) to Guzmán Hurtado stealing away to the basement of the Tandoori Palace restaurant, his pre-pandemic place of employment. Guzmán Hurtado's break, a curious "mirror stage," mirrors the supplement's own connection to and distance from the body of the volume; it is one installation among many of a graphic adaptation of *The Strain*. Significantly, the character in his time-out is still glued to reruns—a *lucha libre* match moderated by a disembodied voice. Panels alternate between that match



Figure 1. Panel from “The Silver Angel” (2013), supplement to the comics series *The Strain*, spotlighting Ángel Guzmán Hurtado as a re-masked luchador. Illustration by David Lapham.

and Guzmán Hurtado’s unboxing of his retired lucha libre mask. The relay effect is replicated visually in a half-page panel of Guzmán Hurtado, suited up again (fig. 1). Behind the (re)turned luchador—as “supra-Latinx” as the undocumented superheroes of Dulce Pinzón’s photographs—movie posters advertise El Ángel de Plata’s bygone matches with werewolves and vampires. The announcer morphs into the supplement’s omniscient narrator, offering a second set of blow-by-blow descriptions of Guzmán Hurtado’s combat with the strigoi. In strobing past-present panels—bounded by gutters of presumably overflowing white blood—Guzmán Hurtado rescues Annika, the daughter of the restaurant’s owners. Annika reappears as a strigoi. Now rescue takes the form of “release” as an angel-child rises from her decapitated body. Later, Guzmán Hurtado slips back into his seat on the mercenaries’ couch as *Worldwide Wrestling* flashes on the TV screen. When one of the young men asks where he’s been, the luchador’s alter ego tersely replies, “Bad burrito.”

Guzmán Hurtado’s one-liner, gastronomically as sophisticated as Elizalde’s retort to the Ancients, recontextualizes *The Strain*’s hyperbolic representations of contagion, genocide, white supremacy, and eco-catastrophe. Simon Bacon meticulously maps correspondences between

The Strain trilogy, *Dracula*, and more recent adaptations of the latter; for instance, he pairs Setrakian and Abraham Van Helsing. Yet, when Bacon arrives at the *Silver Angel*, he boxes himself into a corner, speculating of Guzmán Hurtado, “He is a character specifically created by del Toro to exemplify both Mexico and failure, and a sense of still trying even in the face of inevitable failure” (2014, 76). Laser-focused on the *Silver Angel*’s final self-sacrifice in defeating the Master, Bacon turns to an interview with del Toro and Hogan. Contrary to Bacon’s attribution, del Toro never elides “Mexico” and “failure” therein. In fact, Bacon’s reading of Guzmán Hurtado as representative of Mexico fails to take into account a key distinction del Toro suggests by way of the character Guzmán Hurtado regarding what it means to keep “put[ting] a mask on” (del Toro and Hogan 2012).

Per Guzmán Hurtado’s compulsion to rewind the tape, consider one of the *Silver Angel*’s earliest appearances in the trilogy:

Angel had been a wrestler—the Wrestler back in Mexico City. El Angel de Plata. The Silver Angel.

He had begun his career in the 1960s as a *rudo* wrestler (one of the “bad guys”), but soon found himself embraced, with his trademark silver mask, by the adoring public, and so adjusted his style and altered his persona into a *tecnico*, one of the “good guys.” Through the years he fashioned himself into an industry: comic books, *fotonovelas* (corny photo-illustrated magazines narrating his strange and often ridiculous exploits), films, and TV spots. . . . His films spanned all genres: western, horror, sci-fi, secret agent—many times within the same feature. . . .

But it was with vampires that he discovered his true niche. The silver-masked marvel battled every form of vampire: male, female, thin, fat—and, occasionally, even nude, for alternate versions exhibited only overseas. (del Toro and Hogan 2010, 138, emphasis in original)

The cosmic battle between good and evil staged in *lucha libre* between *los rudos* and *los técnicos*—described variously as “strange,” “corny,” and “ridiculous”; as the stuff of mass culture and the “lowbrow”; and as being of market-niched “genres”—is rendered synonymous with humanity’s fight to save itself and the planet, here and across *The Strain*’s iterations. Humor, unmistakably configured in national, class, and racial terms, is enacted but also indexes a methodology—“supra-Latinx”—against even the catastrophe of taking one’s own project too seriously. To repurpose Water Benjamin: “This is how one pictures the angel of history,” squared off in a *lucha libre* ring, itself squared off in a Greater-Mexican-becoming-global Latinx imaginary (1968, 257).

the-Mex-is Interlude

Carlos Monsiváis playfully transplants Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp" to a Mexican context in "El hastío es pavo real que se aburre de luz en la tarde: Notas de Camp en México" (Ennui Is a Peacock Who Grows Weary of the Afternoon Light: Notes on Camp in Mexico) (1970, my translation here and in what follows). While Monsiváis's essay cleaves close to the formal structure of Sontag's, unlike Sontag, who reads camp as apolitical, the late, great chronicler of Mexico City asserts, "Acudir a la sensibilidad Camp en países donde la ideología oficial rechaza a la frivolidad en nombre de la solemnidad y rechaza a la seriedad en nombre del equilibrio, equivale a sustentar una polémica en torno a la inocencia . . . la búsqueda del Camp nos aproxima a la política" (172). (To maintain a camp sensibility in countries where the official ideology rejects frivolity in the name of solemnity and rejects seriousness in the name of equilibrium, is the equivalent of sustaining a polemic against innocence . . . the search for Camp brings us closer to politics.)

In his 2013 essay "Toward a Methexic Queer Media," José Esteban Muñoz cautions against "trifling" with mainstream culture, advocating instead for a queer media grounded in "methexis," a Greek term that refers to a mode of participant observation, an audience's direct engagement with and insertion into theatrical productions. While Muñoz is focused on methexis's significance to the arts and potential relevance to a reconsideration of television and film's extended flirtation with queerness, it's worth noting that in philosophy, methexis also cues the intimacy of particular and universal platonic forms, affording us the opportunity to rethink relationality apropos to Greater Mexican camp. More precisely, the term's double meaning enables a rhetorical question (with apologies to Stuart Hall): What is this "Mexican" in Mexican popular culture—in Monsiváis's formulation of "national camp"—if not an expansive queerness that reconfigures the very order of methexis as the queer within the query, "the-Mex-is"?

For his part, Monsiváis offers a taxonomy that includes televised *lucha libre* as one example of low or "unconscious" camp, thrusting readers into the arena of a Greater Mexican political unconscious. As the cognitive map bleeds into the cognitive kinship diagram, as I've noted elsewhere (Carroll 2017), Monsiváis's engagement with Sontag's "Notes on Camp" cannot be read in continental isolation. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility" (1991) also recalibrates Sontag's discussion of race, class, and sensibility (albeit, as Ramón García rightfully asserts [1998],

without a full and nuanced reckoning with Sontag's project). Ybarra-Frausto describes *rasquachismo* as "one form of a Chicano vernacular" and as "an alternative aesthetic—a sort of good taste of bad taste" (1991, 155). A character sketch of Guzmán Hurtado: "To be *rasquache* is to be down, but not out," Ybarra-Frausto expounds (156).

Hasta la madre

The Strain's FX series is notable for its opening acts. In one episode, gender giving way to species performativity is portrayed by Eichhorst, who artfully assumes human drag, adding ear and nose prostheses, a wig, and makeup to his/their "person." Another memorable prologue, directed by del Toro himself, cites a cinematic history of 1940s and 1950s Mexican B-movies and television, recirculated transnationally, and a connected Mexican-becoming-global Latinx history of *lucha libre*. The fourth episode of the second season, "The Silver Angel" (airing August 2, 2015), begins with a black-and-white Spanish-language short, fast-forwarded by an unseen hand. True to its title, "Ángel contra el Vampiro Maldito" reaches its first climax when the Ángel de Plata unmasks the Vampiro Maldito and brands the villain with two silver crosses. In a puff of smoke, the Vampiro Maldito turns into a bat—clearly suspended by wires—and flies off. The invisible hand fast-forwards the VHS tape yet again to a castle's catacombs that double as the villain's secret laboratory. The Ángel de Plata battles the Vampiro Maldito and his accomplices, "las mujeres vampiro." When the Vampiro Maldito throws the Ángel de Plata against the death machine, the cracking of the hero's knee is audible, and del Toro's opening gives way to the real time of the episode (the remainder of which was directed by J. Miles Dale). An undocumented worker—the invisible hand—relives his glory days during breaks in the basement of the Tandoori Palace on the corner of 2nd Avenue and 116th Street in Spanish Harlem.

The relationship of the prologue to the body of the episode functions like the relationship of the prefix *supra-* to the adjective-noun-verb *Latinx*. When Elizalde stumbles into the restaurant, Guzmán Hurtado sneers, "We don't need your element here." Elizalde quips, "Your element? I'm the same element as you." But, in the alley behind the Tandoori Palace, Elizalde mellows into his former fanboy self, raised on a steady stream of televised Spanish-language movie reruns. Recognizing the ex-luchador's stance, Elizalde doubly interpellates Guzmán Hurtado and himself: "Ángel de Plata . . . you never took off your mask, but I know it's you." As the

“elements” realign, viewers might sit up and take notice of Guzmán Hurtado’s significance too. *The Strain* consistently elides El Santo and the Silver Angel, and, in the FX series, Guzmán Hurtado is played by Joaquín Cosío, a heavyweight (the like of Barraza) in Greater Mexican TV and cinema. Initially resisting interpellation, despite his bad knee and *panza*, Guzmán Hurtado makes short work of a pack of strigoi, reclaiming his title and cementing his and Elizalde’s unlikely hasta-la-madre bond. Their relationship evolves, beginning with the former’s disapproval of the younger man’s self-styling (the tattoo across the character’s clavicle declaring “Soy Como Soy,” the baggy jeans, the piercings). The characters’ differences are reconciled first by necessity, each begrudgingly admiring the other’s vampire-slaying skills, and later by two women caught “between (the) men.”

In the FX series, Guzmán Hurtado becomes highly protective of his employers’ daughter, Aanya Gupta, after he witnesses her and Elizalde’s attraction to each other. Unlike Annika, her counterpart in the comics series, Aanya assumes an outsize role in Elizalde’s redemption narrative. The pair’s brown-brown romance is prime-time scripted but also spoofs and extends Bollywood variations on boy-meets-girl, marshaling to that effect two popular sign systems of the Global South (what we might recognize as “national camp” raised to the power of two—supra-powers by any metric). Their romance is also heavily mediated by the couple’s shared surrogate parent, Guzmán Hurtado. More than anyone else in *The Strain*, the *ex-luchador* is best able to contextualize Elizalde’s unwavering devotion to his mother too.

In the same apocryphal episode, Elizalde returns home to check in. His encounter with his mother piles “pattern on pattern” (Ybarra-Frausto 1991, 157), “wreckage upon wreckage” (Benjamin 1968, 257), rehearsing Mexicanidad as an interiority consistent with Amalia Mesa-Bains’s observation that Chicana *rasquache* functions in the register of “domesticana” (1999). The episode further assumes the stature of the supra-Latinx and relocates *rasquache* to the Elizalde apartment, which is as intricately staged as a Pepón Osorio installation or as the matriarch’s body, universal and particular.

Historically, theatrical and cinematic horror has been color-coded: red for blood, green and white for the apparition or specter. Del Toro frequently cites this color palette. In *The Strain*, the combination serves a dual function. Inside the apartment, Gus passes one wall that is green, another that is red. A red lamp on an end table casts light on a *luchador*’s bust. Guadalupe—auratic, or more to the point, “Aurora”-like, as *Cronos*’s



Figure 2. Guadalupe Elizalde, post-transformation into a strigoi, paired with the family's *Virgen de Guadalupe* statue. Video capture from "The Silver Angel," season 2, episode 4 of *The Strain*, 2015.

post-Oedipal character of the same name—clothed in shades of green, enters the frame. Her strigoi skin is preternaturally white; her shirt, neck, and mouth are smeared with blood. In case viewers missed the significance of her name, she stands next to a red, white, and green plaster figurine of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* as she readies her stinger to attack (fig. 2). To her left, on the green wall, hangs a painting: *artesanía* that also gradates the colors of the Mexican flag. (Anti)psychoanalytic readings aside, the apartment's supersaturation of red-green-white—consistent with del Toro's reliance on color saturation—functions like a not-so-secret citation of a Greater-Mexicanidad-becoming-global-Latinidades. (Or, for diehards, rewind the tape: the interiority of Tandoori Palace, where Gus Elizalde first meets Guzmán Hurtado and Gupta, is identically color-coded. The supra-Latinx, previously configured as "national camp" squared, diagrams the half-rhyming kinship of the Mexican and Indian flags.)

To preserve or not to preserve one's mother tongue: Gus, an ace assassin of strigoi, cannot kill his *mamá*, the Mother of Mexicanidad. His *guadalupanismo* in this episode and throughout the series is simultaneously performed as fatal and tongue-in-cheek in the tonal-affective register of Monsiváis's and Ybarra-Frausto's adaptations of "Notes on Camp."

Reconstellating

Across *The Strain*'s variants (genres be damned), Gus Elizalde is the only character who refuses to release a posthuman strigoi. Opting to muzzle and cage Guadalupe (first in the family's apartment and later in a tunnel beneath Columbia University), Gus sustains her with his own blood in a manner comparable only to Setrakian, who preserves in a jar the "corrupted" heart of his dead wife. The implications of Elizalde's refusal to eliminate but willingness to impound his mother multiply. The character's commitment to what remains of the human in the posthuman throws significant shade on *The Strain*'s ostensibly brutal drive to contain and eliminate the strigoi as invasive menace and hints at the pleasures of rooting for *los rudos* (with each strigoi as queer as the next zompire in a parallel universe where *técnicos* also refers to the technocrats of neoliberal transition).

The staged humor of Elizalde's compromise, barbed as a strigoi's tongue but also supremely supra-Latinx, infects the whole of the series, including its promotional materials. In the trailer for the show's third season, the very symbol of the United States as a melting pot is turned into a satirically biting commentary on national immigration policy when the visage of an animated Statue of Liberty contorts, her retractable jaws open, and her stinger shoots forth, subsuming the screen. As the trailer suggests, the strigoi (in nesting scenes in abandoned subway tunnels, in rushes on fortifications against them), in the rhetoric used to describe their presence, suddenly bear more than a passing familial resemblance to Lady Liberty's "huddled masses"—occasioning yet another angle from which to assess Guadalupe Elizalde's "golden cage."

Robert Smith (2005) instructs that, although significant Mexican immigration to New York City occurred relatively late in the twentieth century, by September 11, 2001, Mexican diasporic and, by extension, Mexican American/Chicanx enclaves formed pockets throughout the city's five boroughs. Decades later, these same communities swell the ranks of New York's "essential workers," have thus been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and keep on keeping on despite draconian shifts in US and worldwide immigration policies. (Unconscious) historical reconstellation defines the parameters of *The Strain*.

In this register, a parting memory: *The Strain*'s hyperbolic elements assumed another life in spring 2020, when I was living and working in New York City. At the height of the lockdown, I rewatched the FX series on Hulu. Before each episode, in a public service message, Oxiris Barbot,

the first Latina commissioner of health for the City of New York, reminded residents to stay home whenever possible to slow the spread of COVID-19. Her appearance—like some extradiegetic prologue—recodes *The Strain* as an uncanny exercise in periodization. If Kraniauskas amends his notes to suggest that *Cronos* sets the watch of Mexico's NAFTA-fication relative to neoliberal transition in the Southern Cone, in this set of notes I've suggested that *The Strain* highlights a temporal window between the event horizons of 9/11 (2001) and the COVID-19 pandemic's 2020 onset.

Cognitive mapping and cognitive kinship diagramming synced throughout underscore the strain of the political economy (of vampirism) and establish social death as bound up in the post-wreckage of history en route to eco-catastrophe. Neither humor nor overschematized nihilism models a wholly viable antidote, although *The Strain* conjures a potent, supra-Latinx synthesis of both. Hanging in the balance are a fuller accounting of geography and genealogy, the unrealized waking dream of a (brown) commons, and the “fate,” not necessarily tragicomic, of the planet. For now, methexis reassembled as “the-Mex-is” offers a jump-scary reminder that we're still in the ring—*Mask up!*

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Rolas de Nipón

Listening for the Chicanx-Japanese Musical Bridges in the Documentary *Our Man in Tokyo*

José G. Anguiano

The increasingly globalized economies of the past half-century create opportunities or spaces of cultural exchange, proximity, and affinity that cannot be separated from the economic structures that underpin globalization. In these spaces, unexpected moments of people-to-people diplomacy emerge from cultural products and “market trends.” The commodification of Chicanx and Latinx culture in what Theodor Adorno called the “culture industry” dates back to the foundation of the media industries themselves and is rooted in stereotypes that emerge from US conquest and the “tropicalization” of Caribbean-Latino identities (Horkheimer and Adorno 1982; Aparicio and Silverman 1997; Marez 2004; Nericcio 2007).¹ The popularity and ubiquity of “tropical” Latinidades is notable in the music industry, where contemporary artists including Bad Bunny and Shakira embody a global Latino beat that even has Justin Bieber (pretend) singing in Spanish. Yet, while giant media conglomerates no doubt exert power over production and dissemination, they do not have hegemonic control of cultural exchanges and trends and, of course, meaning making (Hall 1973). Examples abound of singular and bottom-up cultural movements led by independent tastemakers, networks of fans, and artists in mutual support of one another’s work (Jenkins 2006).

The globalization of Latinidades means that even Chicanx and Latinx styles once deemed too subcultural or particular have found new audiences around the world. One place receptive to Chicanx art and culture—particularly street culture—is Japan. Perhaps the best-known example is the emergence of a lowrider scene in Japan in the early 1990s. Indeed, the flagship magazine for the subculture, *Lowrider*, hosted its first auto show in

Japan in 1993 and began publishing a magazine exclusively for the Japanese market shortly thereafter. Working-class and middle-class Japanese youth not only admired the cars but also sought to immerse themselves in their full cultural context by adopting Chicana/x-inspired fashion, iconography, tattoos, and music. For many Japanese youth, the lowrider scene was a gateway to learn more about Chicana/o/x people and other cultural expressions such as muralism and music. It even inspired some to live or study in Los Angeles. While lowriders as visual wonders graduated from the streets to museum exhibitions for audiences around the world to appreciate, in this essay I draw attention to how music acts as a cultural bridge of reciprocal relations that goes beyond consumerist collecting, appropriation, or fetishization (Sandoval 2000). While fetishization of “exotic cultures” can manifest through music, particularly in sonic stereotypes and visual representations such as music videos, I focus on music’s potential to generate a shared lived experience of meaningful relationships between music makers and their newfound audiences (Stoever 2016). To support this argument, I turn to a documentary about Chicana/x music finding a home in Tokyo, Japan.

In my analysis of *Our Man in Tokyo: The Ballad of Shin Miyata* (2018), I foreground music and the process of listening to it as distinct from other forms of media and consider how music is intertwined with other media formats. I zero in on music for the ways it is deeply connected to both a personal and a collective sense of identity. Music is often cited as a source of individual ethnic identity development and cultural nationalism and as a way to understand the world around us (Anguiano et al. 2020; Glasser 1997; Kun 2015). In his meditation on songs as spaces for discovering the world beyond our immediate neighborhood, Josh Kun writes,

Songs can orient us to where we are, ground us in a sense of home, but they can also help us imagine where we want to go and reimagine just what home can mean. They are locators, but they are also bridges, sparks, launch pads. Their disorientations can lead to radical awakenings. We just might not be who we thought we were. It’s one of the more common musician origin stories: “I was born here, but when I heard that song, I wanted to go there.” In the space of a song, we can try on new identities, sing through voices not our own, and come to realize that we are not the center of the world. Songs are handshakes and encounters, dances with strangers, and if we truly get lost in them, they become passports, luggage, and moving trucks. (2015, 183)

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Below, I analyze how the musical energy used to hear an over “there” that summons us is not limited to musicians but is present among an audience of close listeners who act upon these feelings to create musical bridges. The documentary explores one such story of a man in Japan who heard a new home in the music out of the Eastside of Los Angeles.

This essay is also an argument for developing new modes of approaching the study of Chicana/Latina culture and performance in a globalized context. I sketch out how the documentary exemplifies a cultural transversalism within a globalized media landscape between working-class Chicana and Japanese people (Lionnet and Shih 2005). Scholarship in Chicana/o/x studies and Latina/o/x studies has long ago moved away from cultural nationalism and essentialisms to define cultural expressions, yet the de-territorialization and re-territorialization of Chicana and Latina culture in places like Japan suggest that culturally specific strategic essentialisms still hold some value. This is both a problem and an opportunity for artists and scholars, as these identifications with Chicana and Latina cultures can be rooted in stereotypes, but they can also be seized and built upon. To use a music-listening analogy, this opportunity is similar to a listener discovering a new favorite song by chance. Though the feeling may be exhilarating and fleeting, it can spark the desire to learn and build a deeper connection with the cultural product and producer. Shin Miyata, one such listener, reveals how pop culture can, under the right conditions, move from fad to purpose.

Our Man in Tokyo

In *Our Man in Tokyo: The Ballad of Shin Miyata*, filmmaker Akira Boch explores music as a process of cultural encounters and commitment. The documentary is on the life of Shin Miyata, a Japanese music promoter and indie record label owner determined to create space for Chicana music in Japan. Boch’s short film brings together twenty years of his own archival footage of traveling to Japan with bands such as Quetzal as well as recent interviews with current Chicana bands and other well-known Chicana activists. The film documents Shin’s journey in discovering not only Chicana music but also the specific history and culture that produced it. In the film, Shin credits his time working at the famous Tokyo record shop Flash Disk Ranch with introducing him to bands like Tierra and El Chicano, stating that he “fell in love” with Tierra’s song “Together,” which led him to collect Chicana music records, films, and literature.

The documentary begins with Boch visiting Shin in Tokyo to get a first-person perspective of what the film labels an “obsession” with Chicana culture. Shin proudly showcases for the camera how his small living space turned independent record label is crammed with over five thousand records and several bookcases of books and movies. In addition to his impressive collection, Shin reveals his in-depth knowledge of Chicana popular culture as he shows off VHS copies of Chicana cultural touchstones such as *Cheech and Chong’s Up in Smoke*, Luis Valdez’s *La Bamba*, and the cholo cult classic *Mi Vida Loca*. While the VHS tapes may elicit a chuckle, Shin turns serious when he next shows the camera a copy of the book *Somos Chicanos: Strangers in Our Own Land* by David Gomez, which he explains he read while listening to El Chicano and Tierra. The book influenced his understanding of Chicana culture and helped construct a mental image of East Los Angeles before he visited the area. Thus, for Shin Miyata, the records, movies, and literature were more than a mere collection, or “obsession.” Instead, they constituted a foundation of knowing the culture and people behind the music he loved, eventually leading him to want to see the real thing in East Los Angeles.

In 1985, Shin took a year off from college and relocated to East Los Angeles. He found a homestay opportunity with a family in the neighborhood of City Terrace. A same-sex Latino couple took him in and integrated him into family parties, church activities, and local events. Shin found his way into the broader Chicana/o community by immersing himself in the music found at Sound of Music on Whittier Boulevard and even enrolled in Chicano studies courses at East Los Angeles College to further his understanding of Chicana culture. The records of Chicana bands like Tierra that he had heard by coincidence in Japan led to a deliberate choice to study and deeply engage with Chicana culture. After his year abroad, Shin returned to Tokyo to finish his college education and begin his next phase in the music industry.

Shin found employment at the record label BMG Japan, where his primary responsibility was to work with the band War, a multicultural group from Los Angeles. Around this time Shin also became a contributor to *Lowrider* magazine’s Japan edition. He wrote a column titled “Shin Miyata’s Anthropology,” where he wrote about social issues in the barrios and explained the origins of terms like *Chicano* to Japanese readers. The documentary flips through some of Shin’s columns, accompanied with illustrations of Mesoamerican-style art and photographs of stoic male Japanese lowriders posing under the iconic Whittier Boulevard sign in East Los Angeles. The near immediate popularity of the magazine in Japan in

the mid-1990s and of Shin's columns signaled a growing interest in both lowrider car culture and the wider Chicana culture from which it originated. Legendary Chicano rocker Ruben Guevara speculates in the documentary that "maybe it was just seen as a rebel culture or something. It might give the youth [in Japan] a sense of freedom or liberty. Maybe their lives are very constrained." Beyond a general sense of youth rebellion, I argue that there are clear points of resonance between Japanese working-class youth and Chicana people, including a do-it-yourself aesthetic and a shared understanding of social stratification along varied points of difference. For Shin, the student of Chicana culture, it was all of that plus a space of joy and possibility for his life.

Shin served as a cultural translator to a Japanese audience that enjoyed the sound but may not have been as familiar with the political context of the music. For example, around 2000, Shin decided to build an independent label in Japan dedicated to Chicana music of the present and past. Quetzal's eponymous debut album (1998) was the first Chicana album Shin released in Japan under his own label, Barrio Gold Records. He worked with Quetzal to release records and bring the band to perform in Japan. Shin was friends with Boch, who made music videos for the band. Boch accompanied and documented Quetzal's trip to Tokyo in 2000. Shots of the band awestruck in the busy streets of Tokyo are accompanied by clips of their performances in local cafés and small music spaces. In one notable moment captured by Boch, Shin introduces Quetzal to a small Japanese audience in what appears to be a café or bar. He explains the band to the audience by contextualizing Quetzal as representing the center of a new Chicana subculture movement in Los Angeles. Band founder and guitarist Quetzal Flores recalls that Shin had a vision for Chicana music in Japan that was "based in humanity and building the relationship between the two cultures, but to do it in a way that was dignified." The shows promoted by Shin Miyata served as a democratic musical encounter meant to teach, entertain, and connect people. "I enjoy exploring the relationship between Chicano music and the listener. The feeling of the love of the music. The feeling that you need the music. I wanted to introduce this to Japan," Shin declares.

Bands identifying as Chicana/o had an entrée to this audience, which was already familiar with Chicana culture thanks to Shin and his magazine column in *Lowrider*. The performances, however, provided the opportunity to expand the audience's understanding beyond lowriders and homeboys. Chicano novelist, poet, publisher, and 2022 California gubernatorial candidate Luis J. Rodriguez, who was also on that trip with Quetzal, recalls

that the first show in Japan “was a cholo event: they had the right clothes, the right stance, the right tattoos even.” Boch includes a still image of the show in question, where we can observe what Richard T. Rodríguez has called the “the homeboy aesthetic”: shaved heads, Pendleton shirts, dark sunglasses, fedoras, and other streetwear often associated with cholo culture (2006, 127–28) (fig. 1). The image and Luis J. Rodríguez’s observations reveal how by the year 2000, *Lowrider*’s Japanese edition helped establish a Japanese subculture versed in the homeboy aesthetic and “Chicano culture” as defined by the magazine and several films. Quetzal Flores notes that in these shows “people got to really see a different thing happen in this space, besides the *vatos locos* and the tattoos and the bombs [cars].” Quetzal played their unique mix of *son jarocho*, rock, and folk while Rodríguez recited his poetry. The shows helped break down and complicate the static “cholo” images circulating in popular culture commodities like *Lowrider* and cholo films. Moreover, these musical exchanges worked in both directions. Boch captured the following conversation between Flores and lead vocalist Martha Gonzalez as they walked the Tokyo streets:

Martha: It’s a trip. These stereotypes that go on in your head before you get here and once you are here all of that is shattered. And you realize that . . .

Quetzal: Chicanos and Japanese people have a lot in common.

Martha: Yeah, sentiment. It’s very similar.



Figure 1. Audience members at a performance by the band Quetzal in Tokyo, dressed in full homeboy aesthetic. Video capture from the documentary *Our Man in Tokyo*, 2018.

David W. Gomez, known as DJ Gomez Comes Alive, offered further points of connection. He hypothesizes in the documentary that Chicana music resonates with people of a certain demographic: “A lot of these guys that come to our shows are working class. They’re the mechanics, the farmers, the janitors of Japan and they identify with that struggle.” For Gomez, Chicana music is rooted in a sensibility that is legible or audible to other people facing class struggle. Later in the documentary, Shin himself alludes to this idea of sensibility. While driving through the densely populated streets of East Los Angeles, he proclaims that what he took away from living there was a sense of “spirit and attitude” that inspired him “to go independent.” A *rasquache*, do-it-yourself aesthetic has long been one of the celebrated hallmarks of Chicana art and culture (Ybarra-Frausto 2019).

Taken together, the performances by Quetzal demonstrate how musician and audience come together to celebrate Chicana and Latina culture in Japan and to “perform” and embody different types of *Latinidades* for each other. The Chicana performers witnessed their own culture, but as transmitted across the Pacific, refracted through popular Japanese culture, and reflected by their Japanese fans. Many of the shots in the middle of the documentary show music events with a Mexican theme that is expressed with, for example, *papel picado* decorations hanging above a bar where beer and tacos are being served. I use the term *refracted* to emphasize how Japanese engagement with Chicana culture is filtered through their localized and societal context. Toward the end of the documentary, Boch presses Shin on his sense of a deeper purpose in being a cultural ambassador for Chicana music in Japan. Shin reveals that he hears in Chicana music a “romanticism” that is now lost in a Japanese culture fixated on high achievement in school and business to achieve social status. This statement should also be read as a class critique of Japan’s rigid postwar corporate structure, which demands workers sacrifice their lives and bodies to the corporate structure. Chicana culture reminds Japanese people that “romantic” arts and pursuits were once valued in their culture. This message of the value of sentimentality and art is also redirected back to the Chicana musicians Shin brings to Japan. Defining Chicana culture as a lived experience that is in a constant state of reproducing itself means Japanese engagement with Chicana culture gives direct feedback to Chicana cultural producers and shapes its future direction. For scholars of Chicana culture, it is imperative to reconsider that culture from the perspective of its global influences and affinities.

The performances organized by Shin were also an exploration or demonstration of global Latinidades in which the Chicanx musicians performed alongside Japanese musicians who were well versed in “Latin” music. Members of the Chicanx band El Haru Kuroi, which toured Japan in 2016, described their surprise and joy at sharing the stage with a Japanese *conjunto* band called Conjunto J. A short clip shows the two bands jamming together, with the Japanese musicians wearing tejanas and playing the accordion and *bajo sexto*. Interestingly, both bands use names from each other’s culture: Conjunto J takes on the Tex-Mex moniker “conjunto,” while El Haru Kuroi is derived by adding the Spanish article *el* to the grammatically incorrect Japanese phrase for “black spring.” The documentary also includes commentary from Tetsuya “Tex” Nakamura, a world-renowned harmonica player who is a former member of the band War and who joined Quetzal on stage at a few shows on their Japanese tour. Other well-known Japanese musicians playing Chicanx or Latinx music in Japan who are not featured in the documentary include *norteño* group Los Gatos de Japón and salsa band Orquesta de la Luz.

Back in Los Angeles, the release of *Our Man in Tokyo* in 2018 was accompanied by musical events and screenings to promote Los Angeles as one node of a transpacific cultural exchange between Japanese and Chicanx/Latinx communities. A key sponsor and supporter of the documentary was the Japanese American National Museum located in the Little Tokyo neighborhood of downtown Los Angeles. An event titled “Transpacific Musiclands,” with Shin Miyata as guest DJ, featured many of the performers in the documentary. Similar screenings and musical programs were also held at local universities, including California State University, Los Angeles, and Pitzer College, in Claremont.

A Close Listening to the Transpacific Musiclands

The fact that Chicanx music (and other Chicanx cultural expressions) has found an audience in Japan is often met with bewilderment and written off as evidence of a bizarre Japanese subculture or viewed as insidious cultural theft (Helland 2018; Thompson-Hernández 2019). Yet, an understanding of the horizontal relationships built between the musicians and the audience reveals a more complex picture. In his pioneering work on popular music, George Lipsitz called these “families of resemblance”: close connections forged from shared aesthetics, politics, and economic experiences (1994, 79). Chicanx audiences themselves recall a long history of transnational

connections to the music and culture of “other” places. Recent scholarship includes many examples of Chicana/Latina fandom for British musicians from the punk and post-punk era, including the Sex Pistols, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and the Smiths and Morrissey (Anguiano 2014; Devereux and Hidalgo 2015; Habell-Pallán 2005; Rodríguez 2022). Shin Miyata and the audience he built in Japan for Chicana music are another example of these families of resemblance. Moreover, we must recognize that these connections link not the communities at the center of global empires but those at the margins.

In their foundational anthology *Minor Transnationalism* (2005), Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih reorient the study of globalization by shifting from a focus on the center-margin relationship to one focused on the relationships between different margins. Lionnet and Shih challenge the notion of top-down and from-below globalization models that maintain the center as the main object of study. Instead, they follow the complex and multiple forms of cultural expressions of minorities and diasporic peoples and “their micropractices of transnationality in their multiple, paradoxical, or even irreverent relations with the economic transnationalism of contemporary empires” (2005, 7). They advocate for a “cultural transversalism” that eschews the binary of assimilation/resistance and differs from a nomadic and “flexible” concept of transnationalism. They argue for a transnationalism that is rooted in the complexity and multiplicity of “the copresence of colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial spaces” (8). This is a useful concept for understanding how the connection between Chicana and Japanese people transpires within a broader national, international, colonial, and postcolonial context that is embedded in popular culture interactions. Moreover, Lionnet and Shih also work to establish that minority or minoritized cultures are always already “hybrid” entities and a part of transnational flows (10). As such, scholars and popular culture commentators risk essentializing minoritized cultures in a search for authenticity or purity in a rapidly globalizing world.

Recent debates in media and social media about Chicana culture in Japan have largely centered on the concept of cultural appropriation. The term grew in prominence as a tactic to critique cultural theft and the profiting, usually by white people, of products derived from other cultures (Lenard and Balint 2020). Concern for minoritized or colonized people’s culture has a long history, but the term itself was popularized in the 1980s and is defined broadly by media scholar Richard A. Rogers “as the use of a culture’s symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another

culture.” He links it to “the assimilation and exploitation of marginalized and colonized cultures and in the survival of subordinated cultures and their resistance to dominant cultures” (2006, 474). Scholars have also argued for a recognition of different types of cultural appropriation. James O. Young (2010) offers three types: subject appropriation, object appropriation, and content appropriation. Chicanx music falls under the “content” category, which, along with other forms of popular culture such as style of dress, is often the main focus of appropriation debates and accusations.

Targets of the “cultural appropriation” label include fashion houses and other corporations that sell clothing that use Indigenous patterns, as well as high-profile individuals such as celebrity chefs and famous musicians and, at times, consumers and fans. While the term has proven instrumental in criticizing blatant theft and power differentials between the so-called First World and Third World (or colonizers and colonized) and between white and non-white peoples, it has also reduced all media and social media conversations about cultural borrowings, travels, and affinities to accusations of theft at worst and reified essentialist notions of culture at best. In other words, complex histories of exchange and more nuanced conversations around power dynamics find no room in a conversation solely about who owns the right to “authentic” culture. One of the main problems with a narrow application of cultural appropriation is the way it renders all whites (or imperialist nations) as all-powerful agents, while all Third World peoples and people of color here in the United States are rendered mute and powerless. Within this construct, Japan remains a nation with an imperialist history in Asia and economic global power. As such, many fashion and pop culture trends adopted by Japanese youth are often automatically labeled “cultural appropriation.” However, this application of the concept avoids looking at the demographics of the various subcultural scenes in Japan. As the documentary makes clear, Shin Miyata operates a small independent label whose target audience is working-class Japanese. Some of the scenes suggest the Japanese audience for Chicanx music and lowriders works in skilled and semiskilled occupations such as automotive repair or light manufacturing. A closer look at this audience reveals structural parallels that transcend language and cultural differences. Following Lionnet and Shih, a stronger case can be made for a margin-to-margin network that exists both because of globalization (global capitalism brings Chicanx records to Japan) and against it (Shin has no multinational label to support his work). Indeed, *Our Man in Tokyo* ends with Boch’s voice-over, in which he explains that although Shin’s Barrio Gold record label

was initially successful, but the rise of music streaming has devastated his sales. Various musicians interviewed acknowledge that Shin “scrapes by” and that his work is a “labor of love” rather than a lucrative venture. This spirit of making do with little is shared, of course, with the Chicana musicians who are themselves working-class artists trying to make a living in a competitive industry. Globalized fields of power are rarely equalized, yet we can say that Shin Miyata and the bands mutually benefited from the records sold in Japan by Barrio Gold and from the shows that raised the money to fund the bands’ overseas travel. As the debates continue to swirl around cultural appropriation, they need to make room for the Shin Miyatas of the world.

Note

1. In this essay, I use *Chicana* and *Latina* to refer to a general collective identity and the suffixes *-a/o/x* as historically appropriate or as individuals refer to themselves.

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