

# PORTAL

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LLILAS BENSON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES AND COLLECTIONS | THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR



Let me extend an especially warm welcome as you open this tenth anniversary issue of *Portal*! This review, originally conceived by Carolyn Palaima and Virginia Hagerty, under LLILAS Director Nick Shumway's watch, has become a LLILAS Benson institution, providing a reprise of the year's activities, celebrating the breadth and depth of our intellectual community. This issue features work by faculty, students, alumni,

and staff, and its contents reflect the interdisciplinary approach we embrace and promote.

As I write this welcome, in the final week of May 2015, two events are foremost in my mind. Our 2015 graduation took place on Friday, May 22, sending off another graduate cohort, with an unusually strong sense of unity, solidarity, and common purpose. Many from that cohort formed part of the UT contingent that attended the 2015 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Congress in Puerto Rico the following week—the largest delegation from any single university in attendance. The fact that eight graduate students from LLILAS had their papers accepted makes this especially impressive, and fitting for the finest Latin American studies program in the country.

This year will be remembered as a time of leadership transition in the library side of our organization. We were thrilled to welcome, early in 2015, our new Vice Provost and Director of UT Libraries, Dr. Lorraine Haricombe. Lorraine brings bold visionary leadership to UTL, with a special emphasis on the principles of open access to scholarly resources, and transformative connections between library professionals and our faculty's core pursuits of teaching and research. These priorities fit beautifully with the LLILAS Benson partnership, for which Lorraine has demonstrated strong support. At around this same time, we were very pleased to confirm Benson curator Dr. Julianne Gilland as Associate Director for Scholarly Resources. Julianne brings to this job well-honed leadership skills, a deep commitment to the Benson's core mission, and great creativity in the challenge of adapting that mission to the dynamic conditions of twenty-first-century librarianship.

We will also remember this year for the achievement of our full complement of LLILAS dual faculty members. Alfonso Gonzales (joint with Mexican American and Latina/o Studies), Marcelo Paixão (African and African Diaspora Studies), and Paola Canova (Anthropology) join our already stellar group of five—Daniel Fridman (Sociology), Lorraine Leu (Spanish and Portuguese), Carlos Ramos Scharrón (Geography and the Environment), Sergio Romero (Spanish

and Portuguese), and Lina del Castillo (History). These eight scholars have come on board as integral members of our organization, and will enrich and deepen the work of LLILAS Benson with uniquely focused energies.

Scholarly Programs, a pillar in the LLILAS Benson architecture, welcomes new leadership as well. Dr. Juliet Hooker, who dedicated five years of superb efforts to the job of Associate Director, returned to departmental duties, and Dr. Javier Auyero stepped forward to take her place. LLILAS Benson is fortunate to have outstanding faculty members such as Hooker and Auyero as part of our team.

We take immense pride in the public programing—some of it highlighted in these pages—that LLILAS Benson sponsors each year. Combining debate on urgent and high-profile current events with deep scholarly exchange, these programs focus on the university community with education of the broader public. We started this year, for example, with a “*foro urgente*” on the crisis of unaccompanied child migrants from the south; LLILAS teamed up with Native American and Indigenous Studies in a year-long faculty seminar on tensions between indigenous territory and diaspora funded by the Mellon Foundation; poetry and the spoken word were on vibrant display at the annual ¡A Viva Voz! celebration of Latino arts and culture hosted at the Benson; and in public engagement, we completed another successful round of our signature Foodways of Mexico series. Stay tuned for another exciting year, under Javier Auyero's leadership, in 2015–16.

In closing, and following the theme of embracing change, we are pleased to announce that *Portal* will also undergo a transformation after this tenth edition. Beginning next year, you will find an increasing portion of *Portal* on the web, alongside additional articles and multimedia content. We owe special thanks to Susanna Sharpe and Teresa Wingfield for conceiving these plans, which are sure to raise LLILAS Benson communications to new heights.

Enjoy reading, and be in touch with your news, thoughts, and feedback!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Charles R. Hale".

Charles R. Hale  
Director, LLILAS Benson

# García Márquez's

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## *Pentimenti*

by JOSÉ MONTELONGO

On the morning of November 24, 2014, the New York Times published the news that The University of Texas at Austin had acquired the papers of Gabriel García Márquez. A few months earlier, Stephen Enniss, director of the university's Harry Ransom Center, and José Montelongo, librarian at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, paid a visit to the house where García Márquez lived for many years in Mexico City, to examine the contents of the writer's archive. In this piece, Montelongo talks about one of the many ways in which this collection will help scholars and admirers better understand the works of the Colombian author.

**U**NDERNEATH THE FINAL brushstrokes of great paintings, below the surface, there are sometimes marks of doubt, hidden lines and suppressed colors. These nearly invisible brushstrokes are called *pentimenti*—repentances, compunctions, remorse. I like the word *pentimenti* for obvious reasons—Italian sounds so very cool—but also because it evokes a sense of drawn-out struggle and internal debate. Masterpieces don't usually come to the world in one simple and spontaneous act of creation, like a goddess jumping out of the head of Zeus, fully formed and pristine. Artistic creation is usually a lot messier than that. It might not be too much of a stretch to venture a rule stating that, when dealing with a literary archive, the messier the better. Maybe not a rule, but a personal preference: the more *pentimenti* contained in an archive, the more I like it.

Typescript of Gabriel García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude."



Image courtesy of Harry Ransom Center

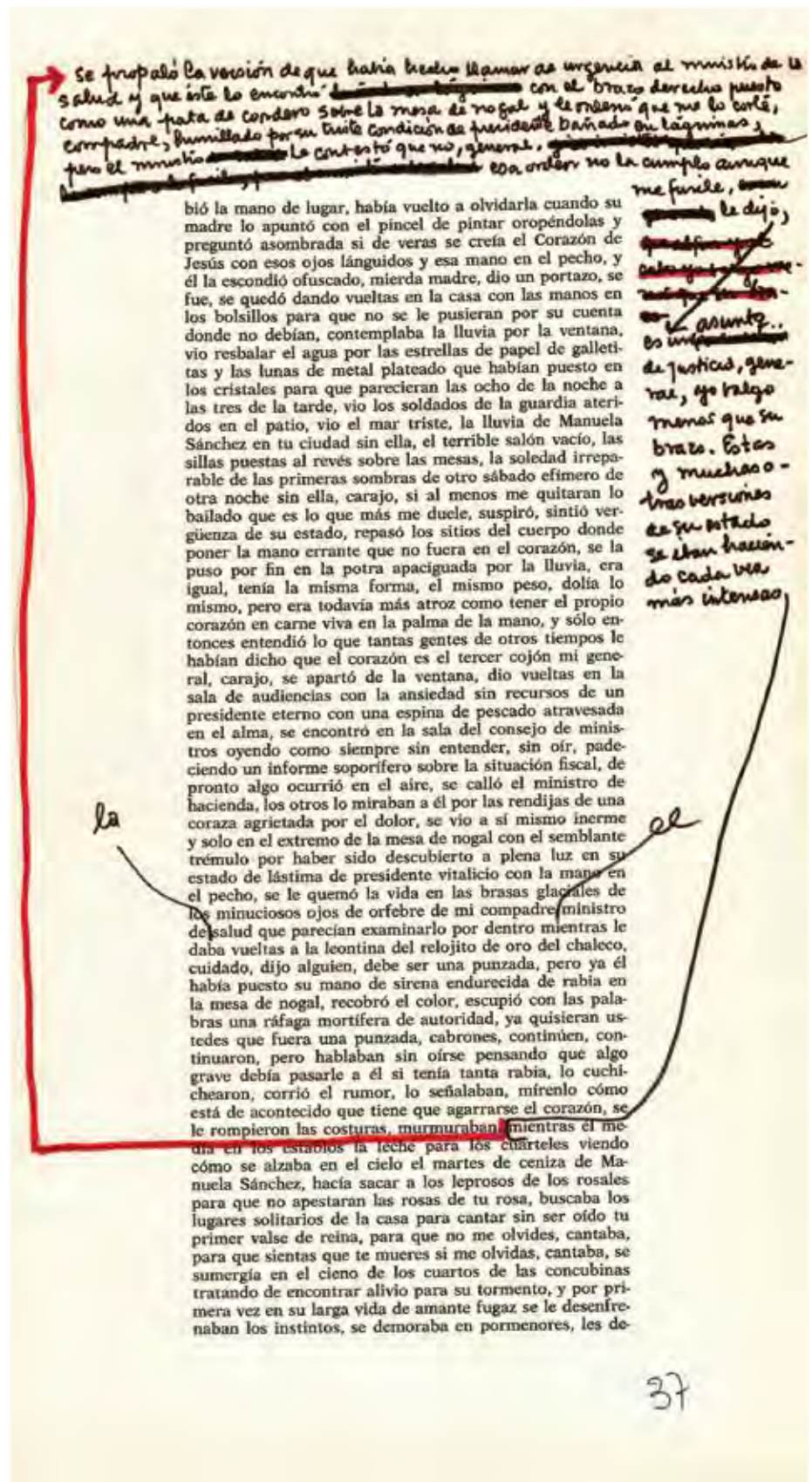


The Gabriel García Márquez Archive, recently acquired by the Harry Ransom Center, contains numerous manuscripts with handwritten additions, crossed-out words and sentences, notes in the margins, excisions, discarded paragraphs, and other evidence of authorial repentances. A somewhat awkward combination of Italian and English would allow me to say that this is a very remorseful collection of papers.

Among the correspondence, there is one letter in which García Márquez reflects on his creative process after finishing *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, and says that he should have written this novel in verse, except he couldn't find the courage to do it. Even though in composing this book he ended up using the pedestrian means of prose writing, I think it reads like a long poem about power and decrepitude, a portrait of a Latin American despot who doesn't seem to know that at some point everybody has to die. In this archive, researchers will be able to study the very idiosyncratic prose of García Márquez as though he had spent his life crafting a lengthy, multi-volume poem with dozens of characters and plenty of melodramatic twists.

Remnants of the deliberative process of a writer are of immense value to scholars and amateurs because they provide a window into the artist's workshop. I mention both the literary critic and the common reader because García Márquez is an author who attained a most difficult and rare artistic achievement: nearly unanimous critical acclaim and a tremendously devoted and numerous readership worldwide. It is truly exceptional that so many readers around the world not only admired the writer but loved the person, and I think this happened because while reading his books they could feel the arrival of a unique sensation, the *nouveau frisson*, the strange and palpable addition of a new imaginary world that suddenly becomes part of one's own psyche.

García Márquez was a master of the short form in novellas that read like Greek tragedies set in the Caribbean, as well as a consummate long-distance literary runner, master of the sprawling, genealogic novel in which everything fits, including history and crime and love and miracles. Above all, he was an intoxicating stylist with the primal instincts of a storyteller. As the literary



Gabriel García Márquez's annotated and corrected galleys for "The Autumn of the Patriarch."



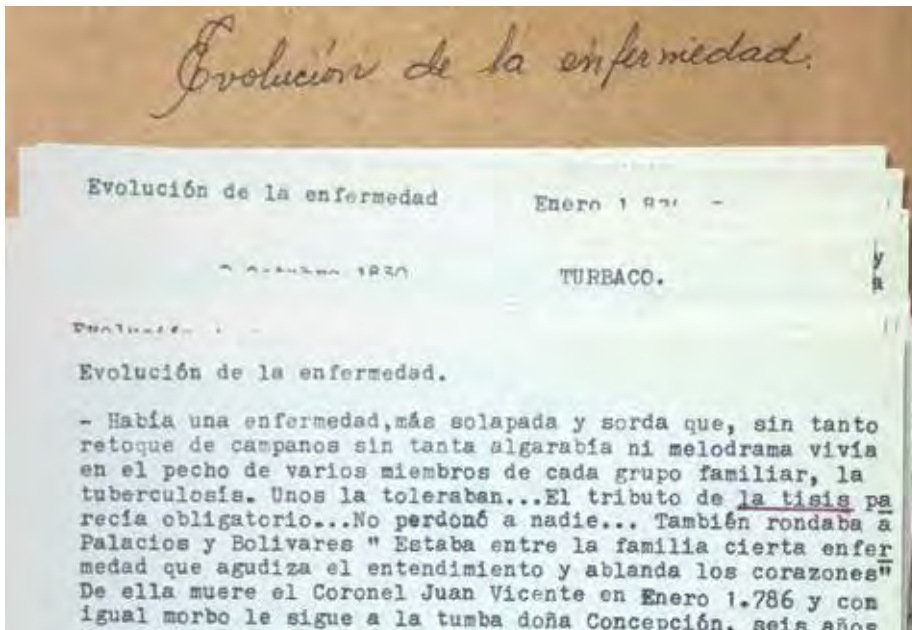
fuera a frustrar a última hora por esta condición imprevista. Hubiera preferido morir, renunciar, echarlo todo por la borda, antes que fallarle a Fermina Daza. Por fortuna el tío León XII no insistió. Cuando el sobrino cumplió los 55, lo reconoció como heredero único, y se retiró de la empresa por la fuerza mayor de sus 92 años.

Seis meses después, por acuerdo unánime de los socios, Florentino Ariza fue nombrado Presidente de la Junta Directiva y Director General. El día en que tomó posesión del cargo, después de la copa de champaña, el viejo pidió excusas por hablar sin levantarse del mecedor, pues ya no podía tenerse en pie, e improvisó un breve discurso que más bien pareció una elegía. Dijo que su vida había empezado y terminaba con dos acontecimientos providenciales. El primero, a los pocos meses de nacido, fue que el Libertador lo había cargado en sus brazos, durante su estancia en la población de Turbaco, cuando iba en su viaje desdichado hacia San

~~Pedro Alejandrino. La otra había sido encontrar, contra todos los obstáculos que le había interpuesto el destino, un sucesor digno de su empresa. Por último, tratando de desdramatizar el drama, concluyó.~~

-- La única frustración que me llevo de esta vida es la de haber cantado en tantos entierros, menos en el mío.

Para cerrar el acto, como no, cantó el aria de los adioses. La cantó a capella, como siempre, y todavía con voz firme. Florentino Ariza se conmovió, pero apenas si lo dejó notar en el temblor de la voz con que dio las gracias. Lo asumió como había hecho y pensado todo lo que había hecho y pensado en la vida, sólo por la determinación encarnizada de estar vivo y en tan buen estado como iba a estarlo 20 años más tarde -- dos semanas después de la muerte del doctor Juvenal Urbino -- cuando entró en su casa



Top: Gabriel García Márquez's notes for "The General and His Labyrinth." Bottom left: Gabriel García Márquez working on "One Hundred Years of Solitude." Bottom right: Gabriel García Márquez and his wife, Mercedes, in Bogotá, 1967.

critic Christopher Domínguez Michael has put it, García Márquez's imagination was so powerful and original that he will be remembered as a creator of myths, a Latin American Homer.

Within the holdings of the Harry Ransom Center, the literary manuscripts of García Márquez become part of a constellation of innovators that greatly impacted his own formation as a writer. William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, Jorge Luis Borges—these writers are at the same time his direct lineage and his peers. More than 150 UT faculty members engage with Latin America inside and outside the classroom walls, and numerous graduate and undergraduate students choose our university for

its emphasis on Latin America. With outstanding patience and perseverance and care, for almost one hundred years the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection has assembled one of the premier libraries devoted to the region. The Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) integrates more than 30 academic departments across the university and ranks among the world's leading centers of its kind. All this to say that, in its new home at The University of Texas at Austin, the Gabriel García Márquez Archive is surrounded by a rich cultural milieu and finds itself in fertile ground for intellectual discussion. So much for remorse, let the celebration begin. 🌟

José Montelongo is bibliographer for Mexican materials at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection. He accompanied Stephen Ennis, director of the Harry Ransom Center, to review the Gabriel García Márquez archives before they were purchased in fall 2014 by the center.

This essay was originally published in the spring 2015 issue of Ransom Edition, a publication of the Harry Ransom Center. LLILAS Benson gratefully acknowledges the permission to reprint it here.

## THE HARRY RANSOM CENTER AND LLILAS BENSON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES AND COLLECTIONS PRESENT

Gabriel García Márquez:  
His Life and Legacy

October 28–30, 2015  
The University of Texas at Austin

The twelfth biennial Flair  
Symposium, on the occasion of  
the opening of the Gabriel García  
Márquez archive at the Harry  
Ransom Center

To mark the opening of the Gabriel García Márquez archive, the Harry Ransom Center and LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections present a symposium exploring the life and legacy of the beloved author and public intellectual. International scholars, journalists, filmmakers, and former colleagues of García Márquez's will speak about his global influence in the fields of journalism, filmmaking, and literature. Elena Poniatowska and Salman Rushdie will deliver keynote addresses.

Learn more at [hrc.utexas.edu/ggm/](http://hrc.utexas.edu/ggm/).



# Geoclimatic Hazards and Environmental Disasters in Latin America: Human Dimensions and Future Challenges

by EDGARDO LATRUBESSE

L

**LATIN AMERICA** is often treated as a single socio-cultural entity by the international community. This

generalist view has permeated disaster analysis, resulting in oversimplification of the complex environmental realities at play in different parts of the region. Understanding geoclimatic hazards and environmental vulnerability in Latin American countries is crucial to protecting human beings and the natural environment, as well as mitigating the deterioration of natural resources.

## Hazards and Natural Disasters

A natural disaster can be defined as an extreme relationship between physical phenomena and a society's structure and organization. Thus, environmental risks and disasters have both natural and human dimensions. Large populations in major urban centers, conflicting economies, chaotic growth of urban areas, devastation of natural resources, and a sharp increase in water and power demands are some of the common problems in Latin America.

The resources available and management strategies required to tackle geoclimatic

disasters, however, may be entirely different from country to country. They depend not only on economic means but also on the political and institutional capacity of each country to face the problems and to prevent and mitigate the hazards. Unfortunately,



Contrast between a remnant of Cerrado vegetation and an area deforested for soybean production in central-western Brazil.

poor investments in disaster mitigation have strained resources to rebuild infrastructure, especially after recurrent events. In many Central American countries, for example, it is not a matter of whether a hurricane will hit, but of how powerful and how catastrophic that hurricane will be. In

the most vulnerable countries, these concerns acutely affect the economy as each new disaster eats away at the potential for overall economic growth. Governments deploy economic resources again and again to repair the destroyed infrastructure instead of developing new projects to improve and replace the existing one.

Because of their location along the Andes chain and the circum-Pacific ring of fire, countries such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina are susceptible to earthquakes and, in some cases, volcanic eruptions. With the exception of the 1999 floods of Vargas in Venezuela, the most devastating disasters in terms of human loss in Latin America have occurred in Haiti, Peru, Colombia, Chile, and Argentina, and were related to geologic endogenic processes, meaning those originating beneath Earth's surface, such as earthquakes and volcanoes.

The 2010 earthquake in Haiti was the most devastating such disaster in Latin American history. No one knows exactly how many people were killed, but estimates range from 100,000 to 360,000. The earthquake

affected the lives of more than 3 million and practically erased the poorly developed infrastructure of the country. It is not a random coincidence that an earthquake in such a tectonically unstable area should have such devastating consequences: Haiti is one of the most vulnerable countries on Earth and stood no chance in the face of a disaster of that magnitude.

In Central America and Mexico, the main disasters causing loss of human life are related to exogenic processes (those occurring above Earth's surface, mainly floods and landslides) as well as endogenic ones. Central America is an extreme example: catastrophic flash floods in small fluvial basins, triggered by hurricanes and tropical storms, affect thousands of people in the region's poorly developed countries. In Guatemala, for example, 40,000 were killed by flooding in 1949.

Floods and landslides are common in mountainous tropical countries such as Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Bolivia. In all of these cases, the catastrophes largely affect urban centers located in hazardous places where basin management programs are highly deficient. Successful river engineering involves assessment by a multidisciplinary team of specialists who can evaluate hazards, impacts, and the environmental feasibility of a project. Poor river engineering has contributed to increased flooding due to unforeseen changes in the natural conditions of rivers. In Brazil, for example, landslides and floods in small to medium-sized basins affect cities, megalopolises, and industrial sites in areas located on or surrounded by a hilly relief (*morros*), particularly in the country's Southeast (e.g., Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Blumenau, among others).

#### Environmental Vulnerability and Human Activity

Public policies and laws have generally been insufficient to guarantee effective disaster prevention and mitigation in many Latin American countries due to the widespread political instability and corruption of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The political factor has also contributed to poor implementation of long-term and sustained national or regional disaster programs. Even when a legal framework

for environmental protection exists, both citizens and government representatives typically break the law. It is common to hear politicians justify their administrative ineffectiveness by blaming climate change for the recurring disasters that affect their countries. This is a preposterous fallacy because the high vulnerability of these societies to natural disasters is mainly due to deficient public policy, not to climate change.

The concept of environmental vulnerability in a region implies evaluating the susceptibility or resistance of the area to disasters that may be caused by natural phenomena as well as human activity. Environmental vulnerability must be taken into account in all future regional, national, and local activities. In environmental disasters, the human dimension can also act as geomorphologic agent, triggering or strengthening processes at or near Earth's surface that can have serious socio-economic consequences and affect the environmental value of a region. Many of the disasters in South America, for example, have their greatest impact on regional economies that are highly dependent on agricultural products. Drought and

floods in Bolivia, floods in Argentina, and desertification and loss of biodiversity in Patagonia and Brazil are all examples.

#### Economic Development and Environmental Disasters

Environmental disasters have a direct relationship to the dependency of Latin American economies on basic extractive commodities (natural resources such as agriculture and cattle ranching, oil, gas, and mining) as they produce large-scale environmental impacts. One of the most crucial challenges faced by Latin American countries is not just disasters affecting society in a direct way, but the accelerated environmental deterioration of their natural resources.

Estimates of numbers of people affected by environmental disasters are usually accompanied by estimates of economic loss. However, these economic values underestimate or exclude environmental disasters such as the desertification of Patagonia, the expansion of the agricultural frontier (and loss of biodiversity) in Brazil, and the contamination and poor management of water resources or glacier recession in the Andes, to mention a few.



Mass soybean harvesting at a farm in Campo Verde, Mato Grosso, Brazil.





Flood affecting the municipality of Rio Branco in Acre, Brazil, March 2015. The Acre River flooded several cities in the southwestern Amazon on a scale never seen before.

In Argentina, the impact of land-use changes over time has been dramatic. Because of Patagonia's historical socio-economic underdevelopment and underpopulation, its shameful desertification is treated as an anecdotal episode in the environmental policy of Argentina. This environmental disaster is now repeating itself with the destruction of the Chaco and the sub-Andean forest along the socially and economically underdeveloped corridors of the country in the northwest and north.

Colombia is another example of self-destruction in the wake of a myopic dream of economic development. Its rates of deforestation are among the highest in the world: although it represents about 0.1 percent of Earth's land, Colombia contributes approximately 5 percent to global forest loss. Both mining and the destruction of some of the

most important coral reefs in the Caribbean exemplify the dramatic environmental situation of Colombia, as described in an article by Juan Restrepo published in *Portal* (2012).

A superlative example is Brazil. With a total of 8.5 million square kilometers of area and around 200 million people, Brazil is considered one of the largest agricultural producers in the world for its widespread cultivatable area and intensive water management practices. With the dimensions of Brazil's territory and its large economy, the tremendous impact of agriculture in recent decades has no comparison elsewhere on the globe, and is not without consequences. During the coffee booms (1840–1930) in Brazil's Southeastern states (São Paulo, Paraná, and others), the once vast Mata Atlântica, or Atlantic Forest, was heavily deforested. Subsequent urban concentra-

tion, sugar cane plantations, and timber extraction contributed to the deforestation of 97 percent of the original total area of the Mata Atlântica biome. More recently, around 80 percent of the Cerrado biome, the Brazilian savannas—once an expanse of more than 2 million km<sup>2</sup>—was practically erased from the face of the Earth in the space of a few decades.

It is shameful that the environmental catastrophe of the Brazilian Cerrado has been largely ignored by the national and international community. The Cerrado region is presently the largest cultivator of soybeans and sugar cane, responding to increasing world demand, mainly by China. Brazil planned to source 10 percent of the world's fuel with bio- or agrofuel in the near future through sugar cane, but the collapse of the international market for biofuel and

the deceleration of economic demand by China shows the weakness of this unsustainable “locust” model, which in record time cannibalized one of the richest areas of biodiversity on the planet. Unfortunately, the “successful” yet unsustainable Brazilian model of large-scale soy production for export seems to be the one now being imitated by Colombia in its Llanos Orientales, where landowners with large capital are starting to exploit the region in areas that lack specific environmental planning.

### Hydropower in the Amazon Basin

South America’s rivers are particularly rich natural resources. Six of the world’s ten largest rivers, in terms of water discharge, are located in South America, and many other of the continent’s rivers rank among the planet’s largest. These rivers also provide home to the most diverse alluvial forests and host the highest biodiversity of fish.

With their abundance of rivers, tropical countries are increasingly turning to dam construction to generate hydropower, in contrast to current trends in developed countries to remove dams. A main engine of this aggressive energy policy has been the Brazilian government. Of the numerous projects under construction or planned in Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, several are financed, or will be, by the BNDES (Brazilian Development Bank) and some by Chinese capital (see the article by Ruijie Peng in this issue). In the case of Brazil, hydropower has been a main source of energy. As a consequence, many of the country’s large rivers, such as the São Francisco and the Upper Paraná, have been irrevocably altered by dam construction.

In this context, the current environmental debate on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions has been manipulated by political and economic forces. Hydropower is rationalized as being clean energy whose production is less detrimental to the environment than that of fossil fuels. Indeed, within the debate on climate change at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a major concern about dams in tropical areas centers on their production of enormous amounts of methane,

a greenhouse gas linked to global warming. Yet this debate does not focus on how much damage they will cause the environment. Amazon basin countries insistently defend hydropower as a source of clean and sustainable energy. In fact, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Colombia have plans to build, in record time, more than 260 dams among them. If their construction plan is accomplished, the whole basin will be impacted in just one generation.

Unfortunately, what is not discussed is the irreversible damage that dams can wreak on the hydro-physical environment, aquatic ecosystems, and regional or local fluvial socio-economies and cultures. Worse, in the case of mega-rivers, there is little discussion of the domino effect pro-

## FAR FROM LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE PAST, HUMANITY IS NOW IRRESPONSIBLY PLAYING WITH THE LARGEST AND MOST ENVIRONMENTALLY STRATEGIC FLUVIAL SYSTEM ON THE PLANET.

duced by dam disruptions. The Amazon basin faces dramatic environmental consequences that will surpass the regional and continental scale, triggering global repercussions. The impact on sediments will be catastrophic for floodplain ecosystems, with decreased sediment load and fewer nutrients arriving to the Atlantic coast of northern South America. There is even a potential impact on inter-hemispheric climatic teleconnections—phenomena felt over a range of thousands of kilometers—with effects that could reach the Caribbean zone and the southern United States.

These major factors are reason enough to recognize that the imminent impacts of dams in the Amazon basin cannot be compared to any previous river regulation project in other parts of the world. Far from learning the lessons from the past, humanity is now irresponsibly playing with the largest and most environmentally strategic fluvial system on the planet.

But as Latin America’s economic development means that energy demand is increasing every day, how to reconcile these issues?

### Alternative Solutions to Large-Scale Hydropower

The justification for large-scale hydropower and agricultural projects is the belief that no other options exist that will serve economic growth and development. Yet such political solutions become irresponsible when they consider only the technical aspects of project scale and not the consequences.

In the case of electric power, why is the building of large dams considered the only option? Why not design and build a more complex and interconnected system of hydro-electric and other sources of energy closer to consumers, with less environmental impact? One such solution would be to improve and diversify electricity generation in small- or medium-sized basins with less natural and cultural value. In the case of agriculture, why do we consider our only option to be the one that erases some of the areas of greatest biodiversity simply because for one or two decades it has become a good deal to export soybeans to China?

A large part of Latin America is unaware of the value of its natural resources. The preservation of these resources will require long-term planning and vision, a solid base of scientific and environmental studies, and a simultaneous search for viable alternatives for both forests and carbon quotas that take into account both sustainable management and economic profit. After decades of natural depletion and overuse, it is time for Latin American countries to learn this basic lesson. ☀

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*Edgardo Latrubesse is professor in the Department of Geography and the Environment and affiliated faculty at the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies.*

### Recommended Readings

Latrubesse, Edgardo. 2010. *Natural Hazards and Human-Exacerbated Disasters in Latin America*. Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Restrepo, Juan. 2012. “The Perils of Human Activity: Lessons from Colombia’s Experience with Soil Erosion.” *Portal*, 38–40.



# Examining Masculinity and Gender in Kaqchikel Sololá, Guatemala

by RIGOBERTO AJCALÓN CHOY

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“THE LAW IS GIVING MANY freedoms to women,” notes an interviewee with some dismay when I ask him about the current status of indigenous women in the rural Guatemalan town of Kaqchikel Sololá. This response exemplifies men’s reactions to the slow but steady pace at which women are gaining in the struggle for their rights to egalitarian

treatment—a dignified life, educational opportunity, access to employment, and political participation, among many other demands. These advances by women imply substantial changes in gender relations and challenges to the patriarchal structure that operates in the community.

The respondent’s answer is interesting because it was not expressed in a traditional and sexist tone, but rather with concern for the possible consequences of changes in gender relations as a result of the few rights already gained by indigenous women. This transformation in the way men view women and their new status shows a great change in men’s attitudes, practices, belief systems, and social values, given that the prevalent idea is still that the restricted space

of the woman is the home. Just a couple of decades ago, the same man would have responded differently.

What I have presented above, briefly, illustrates one aspect of male identity—the perception of women. Kaqchikel men in Sololá generally have versions of themselves based on the physical demands of their jobs and the important roles they play in the community. These qualities are part of the justification for dominance in their heterosexual relationships. In addition, however, the masculine identities of Kaqchikel men are associated with detrimental behaviors, such as domestic violence and extramarital relationships, which endorse the subordination of women and go against efforts to achieve gender equality.

## Master’s Thesis

I address these and other related topics in my master’s thesis, “Masculinity, Gender, and Power in a Mayan-Kaqchikel Community in Sololá, Guatemala,” written in 2014 as part of my degree in Latin American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin through the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS). I considered it important to approach the topic of masculinity as it was a field barely explored by gender studies scholars in Guatemala. I was interested in what it means to be a man, and in men’s perceptions of women

(wives and daughters), of other Kaqchikel men, and of themselves. This kind of information cannot be acquired when working only with women.

The study of masculinity provides important insights for the analysis of Guatemalan society in general, as most studies carried out there look at social class and ethnicity. In order to examine disparities that exist between heterosexual couples, men's versions must be explored.

My interest in this topic is due to the fact that I am a member of the indigenous Kaqchikel community of Sololá, located in the southeastern part of Guatemala City. I know the culture, the language, and the belief systems because I was born and raised in the community (all of this facilitated my access to the private lives of people and my communication with them). I grew up with opportunities (some say privileges) by virtue of being a man. For example, my mother tells me that when I was born, my father ordered the slaughter of a lamb to hold a big party, something that did not happen when my older sister was born. During my childhood I was able to go out and have fun, make decisions about my own life, go to work, study, play, and participate in other activities with my friends. Because of the major changes in Guatemalan society in the 1990s, my sisters were also able to receive a formal education, but did not enjoy the other opportunities I had. These and other aspects of my life prompted me to pursue my study of masculinities.

In my thesis, I explore three important subjects: the different versions of masculinities among Kaqchikel men in Sololá; men's perception of the contemporary lives of women; and the prevalence of gender inequality, including violence and extramarital affairs.

Throughout the thesis I emphasize two historical moments: (1) the experience of the interviewees in the past, that is, before the social upheaval that caused the 1980s state violence; and (2) people's experiences in the present, that is, the time after the great national movement of 1990, which was marked by the active participation of indigenous people in the political arena, the rise of capitalism in the 1990s, and the substantial changes introduced by the signing of peace agreements between the Guatemalan

National Revolutionary Unity party and the state in 1996. All of this caused changes in the belief systems of people, in their material lives, and in gender relations.

The purpose of this study is to open up debate about the many aspects of masculinity. As I have already stated, there are very few studies about masculinity in Guatemala despite the existence of violence and subtle forms of female subordination. However, I do acknowledge that masculinity is not always related to pernicious aspects of gender, because just as there are men who take advantage of their gender privilege, there are also those who reject the use of violence and other forms of subordination and gender oppression.

### Masculine Identities

My thesis project was based on the assumption that there are many types of masculine identities in the Sololá Kaqchikel community that are configured and shaped largely by historical conditions and social and cultural practices. Men's social power and status are underpinned in part by old, well-established ideologies and belief systems, as well as by their belief in a biological superiority, which they justify by pointing to their leadership roles in the community and their hard work in agricultural activities. The

social institutions where men create and learn contemporary forms of masculinity are the school, the family, local committees, and the church.

In discussing masculine identity, I am referring to a network of social relations that is constructed around expressions of gender identity. Masculinity is socially constructed and reproduced through daily interactions. The main feature of this gender identity is that it is embedded in power relations. Thus, masculinity is equated to domination in contrast to femininity, which is generally linked to submission and passiveness (Connell 2005; Bourdieu 2005; Gutmann 2006).

A current characteristic of masculinity is that certain of its features are assumed to be normal practice in society. This assumption legitimizes the subordination of women through cultural practices and institutions. Men have not only developed domination in the home, but also have maintained it in the political, social, and cultural arena. This is evident in the configuration of gender in the workplace, school, and church. Unlike many other studies on masculinity in Latin America that use the term *machismo* to describe men's behavior, this study does not use that term because Kaqchikel men do not use it; instead, they use expressions such as *mama' ach'i* (the big man),



Autoridades indígenas (Indigenous authorities).



*itz'el ach'i* (the bad man), and *ajch'ayonel* (the batterer) to refer to men who engage in sexist or violent practices.

The creation of one kind of masculine identity is strongly linked with the authority and dominance of men in heterosexual relationships. Among the Kaqchikel, the man is the one who usually owns property and a house where the couple lives upon establishing a family. Before starting a family, the man must have a home, regardless of its size. Men are generally the ones who inherit land from their parents. And if land is divided among children, male children inherit double or triple the size of the property from their parents as compared to the size given to their sisters. This unequal distribution of land builds and legitimizes the power of men in heterosexual relationships. At home, the man is the one who usually sets the rules for the family, because common belief dictates that if this does not happen, or if the woman takes control of the household, the family will not function.

#### Men's Roles in the Community

Kaqchikel men stress the importance of their roles as responsible parents and hard workers. The man is the one who goes out to work the land because he has the strength, the skills, the endurance, and the knowledge to work it. A man's work in the field, they say, protects his wife and his children. Kaqchikel men claim that the life of a farmworker is not easy. He must endure both the heat and the cold, and he must bear the stings of insects and plants, and resign himself to eating a cold meal that he has taken with him.

Men's authority has to do with their political and civil functions within the community. An older man who has lived an exemplary life can usually become a *K'amol B'ey*, a communal and religious leader whose purpose is to guide and advise young people. The *K'amol B'ey* is exclusively a male role. He also serves as a godfather or problem solver in the community. Men do not use this term to designate themselves, but are referred to in this way by others.

Other men have leadership roles in the community as well. They serve as presidents or members of different local committees, such as those overseeing water, roads, schools, and street lighting. Men believe that

they are better suited for these positions, so women are not allowed much participation.

There are men who, for various reasons, fail in their attempts to achieve an identity of leadership and power. I refer to this phenomenon as "unfulfilled masculinities." This term describes the experience of disappointed men who are unable to exert their alleged authority in a relationship. These men find themselves vulnerable and without much possibility of fulfilling the prototypical role of a man with authority for four reasons: they lack property, housing, formal education, and a stable income, as compared to their wives. A man with unfulfilled masculine identity usually faces problems of stability in his family and is not comfortable at home.

#### Men's Perceptions of Women

I dedicate a significant portion of my thesis to men's perceptions of women's lives. Men generally refer to a narrative of past versus present. They say that times have changed a lot and that this has brought many benefits to women. In the past, women had very difficult lives: there was no electric lighting, no running water in the home, there were no electric grinders for corn nor home appliances, no transportation. Additionally, women did not have many opportunities for participation in political or social spaces. But currently, men say, women's participation has increased. There are even indigenous women in Congress. Men point out that change is good but that women must still respect the authority of men. They should not transgress the boundaries of acceptable gender norms because this puts at risk the authority of men, which is allegedly necessary for a family to function.

With regard to the division of housework, men usually wield sympathetic speech, that is, they highlight and exalt the work of women. They recognize the fact that women work more than they do, that women's work is monotonous and difficult and there is rarely time to rest. Men praise their wives for doing such complex work. However, they are unwilling to share in household chores because of marked gender roles as well as the force of shame and stigma. Men's lack of involvement in household chores has a negative impact on the lives of women, preventing them from participating in other social and political activities.

#### Gender Inequality, Domestic Violence, and Extramarital Affairs

Kaqchikel men in Sololá express concern that gender inequality is still prevalent. They claim to support the idea of eliminating gender inequality by giving a formal education to their sons and daughters alike. These men also claim that gender inequality was more pervasive in the previous era, when they were young. Yet most of the men I interviewed relied on a basic paradigm promoting gender inequality: the authority of the husband is imposed on the wife in subtle ways so as not to cause any marital conflict or potential separation.

For example, one day as I interviewed Celso, a 42-year-old gardener, his wife came into the room carrying their baby and politely asked me about the nature of the study I was conducting. I answered her question and also decided to ask her about the year she was born because it was the topic we were discussing in the interview. Before the woman could answer my question, Celso interrupted, saying that she had been born in the late 1950s. Celso's quick intervention struck me. Then I looked at his wife again and asked a direct question. This time I asked her about the place where she was born. And again, before she could utter the first words, her husband answered that she had been born in Sololá but raised in another community. I stubbornly tried another question until Celso finally realized that I wanted his wife to answer my questions directly, with her own voice. It was interesting to me to observe that some men think that their wives could be imprudent, inaccurate, and even wrong in their answers.

Domestic violence in communities used to be commonplace due to alcoholism and the character or temperament of some men even when they are not drunk. Local groups have sought to intervene in cases of family violence because they view it as a pervasive factor that affects the lives of all people, most especially children. Today, most men no longer drink as stubbornly as in the past due to religious conversion, near-death experiences with alcohol, or because they have taken courses or workshops on how to prevent gender violence. Yet pressure to drink and commit acts of violence persists, according to this account by an informant named Arturo:

When people drink at a cantina, they start telling you many things. Once they told me, “hey, why did you stop coming to the cantina? Is it true that your wife does not allow you to get out of the house anymore?” And I told them, “Yes, my wife does not like me to drink anymore.” And they went on, “Well, why don’t you beat your wife? I beat my wife whenever that bitch does not follow my rules ...” There, at the cantina, the men start talking about women. They give you the courage to go home and beat your wife.

When violence is excessive, women try to deal with it in several ways. Some file a formal complaint before the authorities in the city center. Indigenous women who are not fluent in Spanish may choose to go to the local COCODE (a communal organization) or the K’amol B’ey. Sometimes women turn to occult practices, attempting to change the character of the man in question with the use of special potions, rituals, or witchcraft. These secret practices are seen as useful, feasible, and, sometimes, the only options when society does not give them an answer to their problems.

Despite being condemned by religious and political opinion, extramarital relationships are still prevalent in communities and seem to be sought more commonly by men. Though they are not always associated with violence, these relationships inflict psychological damage on women, especially when they have children and no option other than to bear the situation. Extramarital relationships show the power dimensions of gender relations, whereby men have more chances to have a lover because of their economic power or simply because they enjoy more freedom than their wives.

### Conclusion

Gender relations in the Kaqchikel community are complex and occur in various contexts, especially the home, community groups, church, and the school, all of which are spaces used to create, maintain, and socialize masculine identities. These identities, as we have seen, have positive aspects for families and society in general, but also pernicious ones, such as domestic violence.

My thesis explores the lives of men who were born during the 1960s or 1970s, many

of whom have a concept of masculinity very particular to their generation. Their stories contrast to those of people born in the late 1970s. To a great extent, this new generation had access to formal education; therefore, their concept of culture and common practices is different. It is good to hear men say, “the times are changing.” I am hopeful this social change fosters a favorable future for men and women alike. ☀

*Rigoberto Ajcalón Choy received his master’s degree from LLILAS in spring 2014. His master’s thesis, which forms the basis for this article, was awarded the LLILAS Best Thesis prize. In spring*

*2015, Choy’s work received an Outstanding Thesis Award from the UT Graduate School. He lives and works in Sololá, Guatemala.*

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Top: Músicos en Sololá (Musicians in Sololá); bottom: Guatemala multicultural (Multicultural Guatemala).

# A Tale of Two Tomatoes:

## The Fair Food Program as a New Paradigm of Social Responsibility

by SEAN SELLERS

**I**N DECEMBER, THE *Los Angeles Times* published a searing exposé on the grinding poverty and rampant human rights abuses faced by workers in the Mexican tomato industry. Over the last decade, Mexican farm exports to the U.S. have tripled to nearly \$8 billion dollars in response to the insatiable demand for cheap produce by supermarket and fast-food mega-brands. While value flows up the supply chain, the immense downward pressure on prices exerted by high-volume buyers has significantly worsened, if not altogether created, a human rights disaster for the tens of thousands of largely indigenous farmworkers who toil at the base of the industry.

The labor practices documented by the *Times* over the course of its eighteen-month investigation are horrific. Workers, many of whom are underage, are recruited and bused hundreds of miles from home, often living in squalid, overcrowded, and rat-infested camps. They are required to work six days a week for \$8 to \$12 dollars per

day. In many cases, wages are withheld, false debts are incurred at the company store, and workers are prevented from leaving by violent camp supervisors, armed guards, and barbed wire fences. Many of the growers utilize state-of-the-art horticultural techniques and adhere to rigorous food safety standards to meet the exacting



Florida's tomatoes are harvested by people, not machines, and are bound for the U.S. and Canada's fast-food and supermarket chains.

twenty-first-century demands of their corporate end-buyers in the U.S. As the *Times* aptly noted, "The contrast between the treatment of produce and of people is stark" (Marosi 2014).

Given the widespread violence and impunity gripping vast swaths of Mexico from Sinaloa to Ayotzinapa, the prospects for these workers in the short run are frighteningly bleak. Yet an experiment unfolding thousands of miles away in Florida could, under the right circumstances, offer a path forward for Mexico's farmworkers in the years ahead.

For decades, the headlines streaming from Florida's fields were not dissimilar from those in the *Times*' recent Mexico series. Florida's vast migrant farm labor system, which extends as far north as Maine in the summer months, was built from the ashes of the South's collapsing sharecropping economy in the 1920s. With wages and bargaining power held down through legislative neglect and Jim Crow violence, this new class of workers quickly became among the most



abused and powerless in the U.S., all while performing some of the most difficult and dangerous work this country has to offer. In 1960, Edward Murrow's famous documentary, *Harvest of Shame*, quoted a grower who neatly summarized the situation: "We used to own our slaves. Now we just rent them."

While the demographics of the East Coast farm workforce shifted in the last decades of the twentieth century from primarily African American to Mexican, Guatemalan, and Haitian immigrants, conditions remained abysmal. To work in the fields meant enduring, without recourse, a gauntlet of wage theft, sexual harassment, violence, and humiliation by one's supervisor. Earnings, meanwhile, had begun to fall sharply in real terms in the late 1970s,

prompting the U.S. Department of Labor in a 2000 letter to Congress to describe farmworkers as "a labor force in significant economic distress."

In the extreme, farmworkers in Florida and elsewhere in the U.S. have faced situations of modern-day slavery, according to the high standard of proof required under federal law. In these instances, workers have been held against their will, with the threat or actual use of violence, and forced to work for little or no money. Several of these forced labor operations have been successfully prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice over the past fifteen years. In one example, two men were each sentenced to twelve years in federal prison after they "pleaded guilty to beating, threatening, restraining and locking workers

in trucks to force them to work as agricultural laborers. . . . [They] were accused of paying the workers minimal wages and driving them into debt, while simultaneously threatening physical harm if the workers left their employment before their debts had been repaid" (CIW Anti-Slavery Campaign).

Today, this reality has dramatically changed, thanks to a worker-based human rights organization in southwest Florida called the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). Built on a foundation of farmworker community organizing starting in 1993, and reinforced with the creation of a national consumer network since 2000, CIW's work has steadily grown over more than twenty years. In 2005, Yum Brands (parent of Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, and KFC)



Photo by Forest Woodward

Most workers are from southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Haiti.



Top to bottom, left to right: (1) Florida leads U.S. tomato production from October to June. Approximately 30,000 workers are required to produce the crop. (2) An Immokalee woman and her child encourage the Publix supermarket chain to join the Fair Food Program. (3) A minimum-wage worker hand-harvests, fills, and hauls one bucket to a field truck an average of every four minutes. (4) A Fair Food Standards Council investigator speaks with a worker during a routine Fair Food Program grower audit.



became the first corporate buyer to sign a Fair Food Agreement with CIW. This agreement established several crucial precedents for farm labor reform, including:

- The first-ever direct, ongoing payment by a food industry leader on behalf of farmworkers in its supply chain to address substandard wages;

- Market incentives for agricultural suppliers willing to respect their workers' human rights, even when those rights are not guaranteed by law; and
- 100 percent transparency for tomato purchases in Florida.

Through its Campaign for Fair Food, CIW has since expanded and incorporated these

principles, including a worker-drafted Code of Conduct with protections extending far beyond the legal baseline, into twelve subsequent agreements with corporate buyers from Walmart to McDonald's. In 2010, with binding support from these multibillion-dollar retailers, the CIW's Fair Food Program (FFP) went into effect in over 90 percent of Florida's \$650 million tomato

Photos: top and left by Forest Woodward; middle right by Scott Robertson; bottom by Smriti Keshari



industry, affecting some 30,000 workers a year.

The Fair Food Program brings workers together with growers, retail food companies, and consumers in a genuine partnership to improve wages and enforce dignified labor standards in agriculture, breaking the isolation of workers that has allowed abuses to go largely unchecked for generations. In four short years, the FFP has eliminated slavery, sexual assault, and violence against workers in Florida's tomato industry. Less extreme abuses such as wage theft and health and safety violations have become the rare exception rather than the rule, and when they do occur, workers have access to a protected complaint investigation and resolution mechanism that is expeditious and effective. Additionally, Participating Buyers have paid over \$17 million in price premiums to improve workers' wages.

The FFP is intensively monitored by CIW and an independent third party created specifically for that purpose, the Fair Food Standards Council (FFSC). Through the Fair Food Program:

- CIW has educated over 25,000 workers face to face, and reached more than 100,000 workers with CIW-produced written and video materials, to ensure that workers understand their new rights and responsibilities;
- Workers have brought forth nearly 1,000 complaints under the Code of Conduct through FFSC's 24-hour hotline, demonstrating workers' trust that reported problems will be investigated and corrected; and
- FFSC has interviewed nearly 10,000 workers over the course of 125 comprehensive audits—ranging from two days to two weeks, including field, housing, management, and payroll components—in order to assess growers' level of compliance.

The sea change brought about by the FFP in the once notorious Florida tomato industry has not gone unnoticed by academic, political, and business leaders alike. Susan Marquis, dean of the Pardee RAND Graduate School, told the *New York Times* last year, "When I first visited Immokalee, I heard appalling stories of abuse and modern slavery.

... But now the tomato fields in Immokalee are probably the best working environment in American agriculture. In the past three years, they've gone from being the worst to the best" (Greenhouse 2014).

President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton honored the CIW with the 2014 Clinton Global Citizen Award "for defending the human rights of farmworkers across the United States." From the stage, President Clinton called the FFP "the most astonishing thing politically happening in the world we're living in today." He later added, "You've got a success model, and you ought to put the pedal to the metal." Just months later, at a White House ceremony, Secretary of State John Kerry presented CIW with the Presidential Medal for Extraordinary Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking for "pioneering the Fair Food Program, empowering agricultural workers, and leveraging market forces and consumer awareness to promote supply chain transparency and eradicate modern slavery on participating farms."

Perhaps more remarkably, last year, Walmart, the world's largest retailer, joined the Fair Food Program. Walmart became the first buyer to join the FFP not as a result of the Campaign for Fair Food, but rather because of the unprecedented success of the program itself. Walmart's entry into the FFP set the stage for formal expansion beyond the Florida tomato industry. Beginning this summer, the FFP now covers the largest tomato farms in Georgia, North and South Carolina, the Delmarva Peninsula, and New Jersey. In fall 2015, the FFP will launch a pilot project in a second crop in Florida. And a recently launched Fair Food label is increasing awareness of the program at the consumer level. As Janice Fine, a labor expert at Rutgers University, has noted, "This is the best workplace-monitoring program I've seen in the U.S. [The FFP] can certainly be a model for agriculture across the U.S. If anybody is going to lead the way and teach people how it's done, it's them" (Greenhouse 2014).

CIW has pioneered a new paradigm of worker-driven social responsibility—a form of human rights protection that is designed, monitored, and enforced by the very workers whose rights it is intended to protect—with implications far beyond U.S. fields. For example, the Bangladesh Accord on Fire

and Building Safety—a groundbreaking, worker-enforced program to make garment factories in Bangladesh safe—grew out of years of effort by the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) and allied groups. The Accord, under which more than 190 apparel brands and retailers have made binding commitments, draws on the WRC's experience enforcing apparel industry labor codes and on the experience of the Fair Food Program, and it is already having a profound impact in Bangladesh in the wake of the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse.

As for the Mexican agricultural industry, progress will not be easy or quick. As long as the sociopolitical environment remains lethal for those struggling to secure a more dignified life, justice for the country's farmworkers will likely remain unattainable. After all, as recently as the 1960s, racial terror permeated rural Florida and undermined the rule of law for those who most needed its protections, including the state's farmworkers. It was only after this dark era came to a close that workers could begin the slow process of, brick by brick, transforming their industry. As a result of their efforts, the Florida tomato industry of 2015 is light years ahead of its 1960s predecessor. If the broader tide can be turned in Mexico, then the lessons and promise of the Fair Food Program will be waiting in the wings. ☀

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*Sean Sellers is a co-founder and senior investigator at the Fair Food Standards Council in Sarasota, Florida. He received an MA from LLILAS in 2009. Three other LLILAS graduates currently work at the FFSC. For information on job opportunities, please contact [info@fairfoodstandards.org](mailto:info@fairfoodstandards.org).*

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# The Spoken Word Reverberates

**T**HE WORDS WERE MOVING, spoken in a voice that sounded almost like weeping. They were spoken in Spanish, boisterous, yet sharp with meaning. They were sassy, uttered with Tejana attitude. They were songs recited rhythmically, in the cadence of hip-hop. They were pronounced quietly, reminding us of the poet's patient, observing eye.

"¡Viva!" came the shout.

"¡Voz!" we responded.

And suddenly the audience itself was part of the poetry.

This vibrant scene took place in the main reading room of the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection on April 2, 2015. The event was the thirteenth annual ¡A Viva Voz!, LLILAS Benson's signature celebration of U.S. Latina/o culture. This edition was titled *Migraciones: An Evening of Poetry and Spoken Word*, and featured an array of poet-performers, each utterly different than the others, each captivating and engaging in his or her own way.

According to Margo Gutierrez, Mexican American and Latina/o studies librarian at the Benson Collection, "the idea for ¡A Viva Voz! came from Ann Hartness, former head librarian. It was meant to attract community members who might otherwise not know about the Benson Collection and about the rich resources found here about Latinas/os and Mexican Americans. It continues to be important for those reasons, particularly as the Latina/o population increases in and around Austin."

The first-ever ¡A Viva Voz! featured poet Pat Mora. In subsequent years, the guests have included playwrights, artists, filmmakers, musicians, and a cartoonist. "This year," says Gutierrez, "we felt the time was right to return to poetry and spoken word with a diverse group of poets and artists who span generations and genres." The Benson couldn't have picked a better lineup.

The event was moderated by the animated Celeste Guzmán Mendoza, poet and co-founder of CantoMundo, a nonprofit that supports and nurtures the work of Latina/o poets. She engaged the audience with

a rousing call and response—"¡Viva!" "¡Voz!"—and shared her own contribution to the evening, "The Crooked Pinky." Mendoza also serves as Associate Director for Development at LLILAS Benson.

Each of the readers who followed brought a unique voice and presence. Ariana Brown shared her vulnerability and reflections on identity in beautifully crafted pieces. She is a senior at UT and a co-founder of Spitshine Poetry, a slam poetry group that has won numerous competitions and accolades.

Marco Cervantes (aka Mexican Stepgrandfather) declaimed in hip-hop rhythms and rhymes as he touched on difficult themes of race and discrimination. In addition to being a performer, he is assistant professor in the Department of Bilingual and Bicultural Studies at UT San Antonio, where he teaches and researches transculturation and shared spaces among African American and Mexican American communities.

Odaymara Cuesta and Olivia Prendes, Cuban-born artists who perform together as Las Krudas, opened with an exquisite capella Afro-Cuban duet before launching into their set of hip-hop-inflected poems, which they performed both together and separately, mostly in Spanish. Self-identified queer feminist activists, the pair has a strong creative background in Havana's street art and performance scene. Their beautifully written material ranged from searing to humorous.

Poet, author, and educator Teresa Palomo Acosta closed the evening with a cycle of five works she wrote about a boy named Justin and his mother, Paula, who are refugees from Honduras. "I met them at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in McAllen, Texas, when I traveled to the Rio Grande Valley to teach oral history to college students in fall 2014," Palomo Acosta explains. "This and the other four poems I wrote about Justin and Paula were drawn from our time together, and from my concern about the possible outcomes of their journey through the American judicial system as Central American refugees."

May the poems and images that follow speak for themselves and resonate with that common part of all of us. —Susanna Sharpe

# at 13th Annual iA Viva Voz!

## INVOCATION

*after aracelis girmay, arati warrier, and angel nafs*

you were once teenage purveyor of the white girl gospel— zealous pupil of the hot comb, of oily neck and folded ear, but before that, you were young. you were probed with questions about your dead father and your hair. your first conversation with god, faithless. child of the singing forehead. child of the frustrated wrist. your mother yelled because you fell asleep on your aunt's pillows and now the whole couch smells of you. child of amorous pomade. everyone can tell where you've been. even bus windows remember your name. child of the curl that stole the wind's fury. how could everything about you not be bursting? child of the busted chongo. child of the broken brush. splitting anything weak in half while still blushing for a gentle hand. you are your own lesson in commitment. child of royalty, of the silk scarf before bed. defender from the cotton resurrected each night to steal you back, every pillowcase a looming field of ghosts. child of the rained out funeral. child of grocery bag protection. at age twelve, washing your own hair is your first act of humility. listening to your blackness, your first mode of resistance. child of the eloquent scalp, which negotiations did you lose today? how many times did you lift your hands in ceremony to unravel and partition? tell us how you learned to fix, fluff, and plait; to wind and plow. how you were late for class and work doing so. how you skipped breakfast. how you tended. how you greeted a new ancestor in the mirror and let their moans trickle and slither down the length of you. how each strand circles back to its own beginning. child of inheritance, rejecting gravity & its theorems. the eternal fuck you. when the weather catches you unprepared, you curse each raindrop undoing your labor with its disrespectful weight; but unlike anything else in the world, when smothered in water, submerged in a substance thick enough to kill you, nearly drowned and gasping— you rise, and refusing invisibility, grow to the size all benevolent gods are.

ARIANA BROWN



Todavía.

Opresiones, opresiones, se cruzan las opresiones.  
Hasta lxs más oprimidxs oprimimos, opresiones.



No porque esté presente  
eso significa que mi corazón asiente.

No porque en silencio esté  
eso significa que apruebo lo que dice uste'.

No porque aquí vine a sobrevivir  
eso significa que voy a compartir  
lo que quienes dominan determinan.

Nací y crecí en Cuba y  
tomé los "beneficios" de su socialismo o muerte,  
*eso no significa que esté de acuerdo con ellxs.*

Emigré a Estados Unidos  
y cobro y pago dólares culpables asesinos,  
*eso no significa que esté de acuerdo con ellxs.*

Diariamente contribuyo  
con el aburguesamiento de la ciudad,  
*eso no significa que esté de acuerdo con ellxs.*

He tenido que servir a quienes  
explícita o implícitamente discriminan a mis hermanxs,  
*eso no significa que esté de acuerdo con ellxs.*

Aunque llore o sonría en silencio  
ante las injusticias de quienes mandan,  
*eso no significa que esté de acuerdo con ellxs.*

Algunxs han podido elegir.

Algunxs, sólo algunxs.

Soy artista, *soy emigrante*. Soy Negra, *soy emigrante*.  
Soy consciente, *soy emigrante*. Soy cubana, *soy emigrante*.

Soy rarx, *soy emigrante*. Soy Krudx, *soy emigrante*.

No conforme. *Soy emigrante*. Soy activista, *soy emigrante*.

Soy anarquista, *soy emigrante*. Soy feminista, *soy emigrante*.

Todavía hay tantx que no hemos tenido la opción de denunciar.

Todavía hay tantx que no hemos tenido la opción.

Todavía hay tantx que no hemos tenido.

Todavía hay tantx que no hemos.

Todavía hay tantx que no.

Todavía hay tantx que.

Todavía hay tantx.

Todavía hay.

Todavía.

ODAYMARA CUESTA AND OLIVIA PRENDES





## Crooked Pinky

Lisa juttet her hands up to my face, *I'm a Rodriguez too. Got grandma's pinkies.* All us Rodriguez women are crooked little-finger ladies. We're buried with beaded rosaries wrapped snugly around our clasped palms, crucifixes dangling below the crook in our pinkies. Lisa feels connected to us. She is and isn't. Half-Canadian so she's a pale-skinned, blue-eyed, dirty blonde and didn't grow up eating tacos; at 22 she can't hold one without the stuffing dangling or falling out. But the pinky is her proof that she is from this line of hard, dark-skinned Mexican women, rock candy ladies that take espinas from nopales with our teeth when a knife isn't handy. We are known for starting fights with other women and even our husbands could (but never would) confess to receiving a cracked bone or two from a Rodriguez woman's clenched fist. The crocheted doilies we make are coasters for our beer. We knit for our husbands so they'll know our hands are agile with sharp objects. Lisa doesn't know this history, can't name our abuela's hand cream, doesn't know great tía's secret handshake. But she has the crooked pinky every Rodriguez woman carries as we live our lives any way but straight.

CELESTE GUZMÁN MENDOZA



## In which Justin speaks for himself

My mother and I made our case.  
Now the lawyers and judges  
will decide if we stay, or if we go.

I was not in the courtroom,  
but outside my primos' house,  
bouncing a ball against the wall.

Tíos and tías called out,  
"Justin, Justin, ven a cenar."  
Some food I've never tasted  
was placed in front of me.  
A primo said, "It's hummus."  
A tía has taken it up,  
loading it on top of her pita bread,  
which looks like a tortilla.

I waited until 'amá sat down  
at the table before I tasted it.

I studied the dirt  
caked on my new zapatos.

TERESA PALOMO ACOSTA





## Arizona to Texas

US border patrol asking  
for my documents as I pull up blasting

“By the Time I Get to Arizona”

It doesn't matter if you have a diploma  
It doesn't matter if you feed the economy  
It doesn't matter if you believe in the monopoly

getting searched now, no probable cause  
they try to move us all out of the state with a clause,

a Senate Bill of fear, lies that they hand me, slamming me  
on the cop car, damaging, mad at me for what?

For supporting this nation of glut  
and they think we won't stand up

when Texas school boards retell the past to the young  
a story for some to try to keep us dumb

with lies they cover up resistance:  
raza uprisings and lynchings all silenced

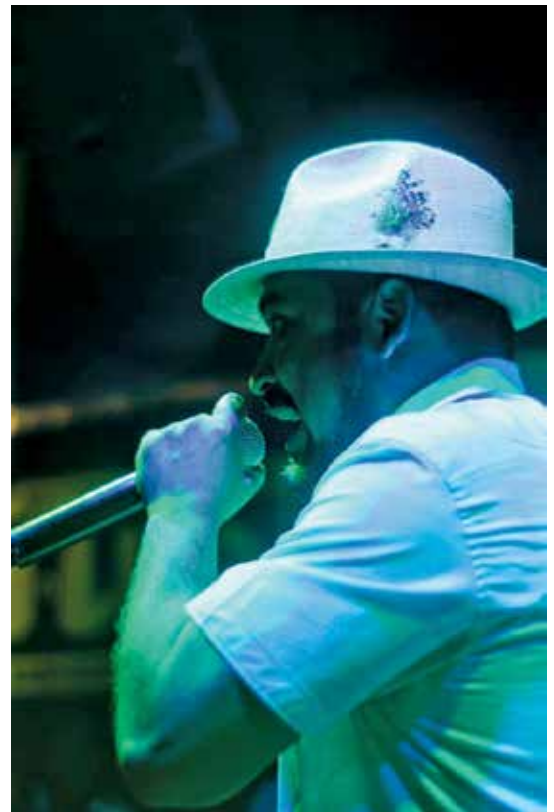
I want to know “What's Going On?” like Marvin Gaye sings  
as I watch the hatred that life brings

pride stings on a street sign, projecting hate to my people  
saying that we're not equal

with alien references and fences  
we're cast off as irrelevant and defenseless

but against this hate  
I drive on and transcend borders across states

MARCO CERVANTES



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Top photo © khuruzero/Shutterstock.com; bottom photo by Deborah Siliman Wolfe

# Politics or Fish?

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## What the Normalization of Cuba–U.S. Relations Means for Food

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by SARA LAW



**MY FIELDWORK** and the last year of my master's work occurred during a remarkable time in Cuban politics and Cuba–U.S. relations. On December 17, 2014, President Barack Obama announced a shift in policy toward normalizing relations between Cuba and the United States:

Today, the United States of America is changing its relationship with the people of Cuba. In the most significant changes in our policy in more than fifty years, we will end an outdated approach that, for decades, has failed to advance our interests, and instead we will begin to normalize relations between our two countries. Through these changes, we intend to create more opportunities for the American and Cuban people, and begin a new chapter among the nations of the Americas.

I have hesitated to discuss Cuba–U.S. relations in my work in an effort to distance myself from the Western-centric dialogues around Cuba, and to avoid Cold War clichés. However, as the months roll by and more news articles are released about Cuba–U.S. involvements, I would be remiss not to mention the impact this normalization will have on food and the politics of food.

### “El Pescado Parece Como Pollo”

Exploring the food markets in La Habana, there is something noticeably missing—fish. There is chicken, pork, and even sometimes beef hanging from the small green stalls, but never fish. It is not obvious at first, but over time it grows more apparent that there is something lacking, a haunting of something that should be, a feeling of something missing in the back of your mind: that a nation surrounded by water does not have a thriving fish market. Even though fish is allotted in the Cuban *libreta*, or ration book, this allotment is rarely filled. This has given way to a popular yet dark rationing joke that the fish rations look like chicken: “*el pescado parece como pollo*.”

I have heard different accounts of why there is no fish. Some say that it is because Cuba has a trade deal with other countries for fish, others say that the state is purposely holding out on La Habana markets. Rumors in Cuba are often closer to the truth than the “Truth” is. However, on December 17 it was reported by Yoani Sánchez, the famous and often controversial female Cuban blogger, that there was finally fish for sale. What she wrote has stayed with me for the entirety of my thesis: *¿Oigo los discursos o compro el pescado? / Do I listen to speeches or do I buy fish?*

This accurately sums up an argument that I have been grappling with during my master's research. How do I address the complicated, contentious, and inseparable strands in the web of food and politics? Should they be placed at odds with one another? Do we



listen to speeches, or do we buy fish? Maybe we should do both. Food is political. Cuba's economic crisis, the Special Period, was brought on by a set of *political* decisions of the Cold War that ultimately brought Cuban society down to its most basic living conditions. This crisis that has haunted Cuba since the 1990s was marked by the collapse of the cattle industry, the near failure of the agricultural industry, and the meagerness of rations that led to rampant food insecurity. A set of historical, political moments set into play some of the leanest years in Cuba. The normalizing of relations brought back fish. I cannot ignore this. Food is political.

### Obsession with Food and New Trade Relations

Apparently, I am not the only one who thinks so. In the months following Obama's announcement, National Public Radio (NPR), the *New York Times*, and several Cuban blogs brought food politics and agriculture to the forefront of the normalization of Cuba–U.S. relations. This is to say that food is increasingly being recognized as a conversation that is inextricably linked with the political.

The day after President Barack Obama announced a new chapter in Cuban–U.S. diplomacy, NPR ran the story “What the Change in U.S.–Cuba Relations Might Mean for Food” (Barclay 2014). It addressed the “jigsaw” nature of Cuba's food markets and currencies, the lack of beef and fish, the potential for trade with the American Farm Bureau, and what this trade policy could mean for the future of Cuba's food. Not even a month later, NPR ran another story on a recent initiative led by Miami Cuban-American chef Douglas Rodriguez to take Americans on a culinary tour of La Habana (Vidal 2015). In the beginning of March, the *New York Times* published a hopeful piece on the promise of increasing agricultural trade relations. The article highlights a bipartisan group of U.S. senators who are working to introduce a bill to end the embargo, with clear farm and business backing.

These articles portray a refreshing reality about Cuba–U.S. relations. They are not counting down the days until McDonald's

establishes its bright yellow arches on the Malecón. They exercise restraint and a measure of respect for Cuba's agency in the matter. John Kavulich, president of the U.S.–Cuban Trade and Economic Council, cautions, “What people tend to forget is it's not what the U.S. wants to do to for Cuba. It's about what Cuba feels is in its interest” (Barclay 2014). This is a clear divergence of thought from even twenty years ago, when Cuba was portrayed as a helpless island waiting for the United States to save it from itself.

It is not just U.S. foodies, scheming senators, and the agriculture lobby who are rooting for the return of normalized diplomatic

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THRIVING FISH MARKET.

relations. Many Cubans have expressed excitement about the variety of food they hope will appear in markets. Yoani Sánchez writes:

The great national obsession, which is food, also has had a space within the imaginative dreams of recent weeks. A housewife, who defines herself as “sick of having to cook the same thing, because there is nothing else,” has projected her illusions on the arrival of goods from the north. “Some lost products will return and the stores won't have empty freezers like now.” Her perspectives are direct and clear, experiencing the lost taste of beef, the texture of oil and the smell of an onion browning in the pan. (February 3, 2015)

This is a common sentiment I heard while I was in La Habana. Many Cubans long to

brush off their dusty cookbooks and try their hand at recipes they have long since forgotten due to the lack of ingredients. Items like beef and fish have been calling high prices on the black market. As I mentioned earlier, fish has been missing from the Cuban markets for many years with the exception of December 17, 2014. Beef is rarely seen in the markets because Cuba's cattle population has suffered severely since the Special Period and is now dwindling. There are even rumors now that the state will replace cattle with water buffalo, a hardier breed but just as tasty. There have been many attempts to increase the cattle industry's numbers, but the climate and poaching have impaired its ability to sustain growth. *Ropa vieja*, a traditional Cuban meal made with beef, is now a delicacy in *paladares*—private Cuban restaurants—instead of being served in the household.

This movement toward analyzing food politics and sustainability is an affirmation that, as a feminist critical food scholar, I am not crazy for spending two years of my life reading, living, and breathing this topic. However, there are clearly broader implications for the discussion of food politics than my own self-satisfaction. Until recently, food has been relegated to the private, the domicile. The process of buying, preparing, and consuming food was considered within the realm of women's work and unworthy of academic (or any) attention. In the past few years, scholars like Pollan (2007), Guthman (2007, 2008), and Alkon (2014) have brought the politics of food and food access into the public sphere.

In the United States, food justice advocates have battled against inequalities in the food system and called for a global structural shift in how we understand, produce, and consume food. This movement is happening in a primarily local, Western urban sphere and encourages grassroots sustainable food systems in low-income communities of color. Advocates in the United States have called for a global structural shift in how we understand, produce, and consume food. Additionally, scholars like Harper (2011) and Slocum (2007) have addressed how food implies more than a biological



Photo by Sara Law

This *organopónico* stand is adjacent to one of the largest urban agricultural sites in La Habana and sells directly to the consumer.





Photos by Sara Law





need to survive but also a political process that interweaves lines of race, class, gender, and culture. However, there are crucial issues that we have ignored, like the loss of farmland for Indigenous, Latino, and Black farmers, the vulnerabilities of workers' rights in industrial agriculture, and the insecurity of urban land for food production. Cuba's relationship with food has historically been political, evidenced by the emergence of a sustainable, organic agricultural model to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis of the 1990s. The Cuban government appropriated the once grassroots urban garden movement to become a symbol of the resilience of the Cuban people and the ideology of the Revolution.

The sustained conversations of Cuba–U.S. relations regarding food bring hope, not only for the future of food access on the island but for the trajectory and recognition of food politics in Cuban society. However, we are not there yet. Despite reports of Netflix, Airbnb, and MasterCard coming to the island, the embargo is still in place as of this writing. There have been great strides, like the easing of travel sanctions, talks to establish embassies, the release of Alan Gross, and the removal of Cuba from the terrorist list, but we are still waiting on Congress and that could be a long wait. Yoani Sánchez jokes, “Cuba is changing at the speed of a tortoise that flies by clinging to the legs of an eagle.” While we wait to see what implications the normalization of relations might bring (perhaps more fish?), I ask that we continue to critically interrogate socio-political structures of food in Cuba as well as in our own communities. ☀

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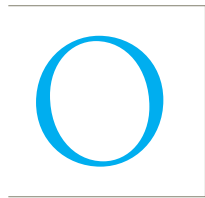
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Top: One of the largest raised-bed urban agriculture sites, or *organopónicos*, in La Habana. It is located in an affluent area on the border of the city’s downtown area. Bottom: Row of Cuban trucks bringing in their produce into the Trigel, a large agro-market on the outskirts of La Habana during the summer months.

# Going Local: Understanding Chinese Transnational Hydroelectric Projects in Ecuador

by RUIJIE PENG



**OVER THE PAST DECADE**, China and Latin America have experienced exponential growth in trade and direct investment. China is now the second largest source of imports and the second largest export destination for Latin American

goods, behind only the United States in both trade and foreign direct investment (Chen and Pérez Ludeña 2013). Yet the numbers tell a limited story that gives insufficient attention to the experiences of human actors. As a master's student at LLILAS, I became curious about the impact of Chinese foreign direct investments on people.

## My Research

During my first semester at LLILAS, I developed a proposal to carry out research in two major areas to which Chinese investments flow in Latin America, the mining sector and the infrastructure construction sector. My previous research had identified the Peruvian mining sector as a prominent recipient of Chinese investment, while Chinese involvement in infrastructure construction is largely concentrated in Ecuador. In fact, although overall Chinese investment in Latin America is still in its initial stages, China has quickly become the largest source of foreign investment in Ecuador. I learned that a Chinese development bank had already provided a loan to the Ecuadorian government to finance what would be Ecuador's largest hydroelectric power plant. Moreover, the plant is the first and largest project to be financed by a Chinese development bank and built by a Chinese construction firm, Chinese Hydroelectric Company (CHC).<sup>1</sup> I became interested in the growing economic and political ties between China and Ecuador as they are reflected in the construction of the project, and I decided to travel to Northern Ecuador for field research that summer.

During the preparatory phase of my research, I collected reports and investment statistics about the hydroelectric project. I quickly realized, however, that most of the information available on the Internet about the project was critical of its likely environmental impacts in Ecuador's Northern Amazon. Additional searches turned up sporadic reports about Ecuadorian worker protests over the quality of the food and water at the project site.

Both the environmental impacts and workers' rights protests caught my attention. As I read further into different reports, I noticed that while potential environmental impacts were contentious from the very beginning of the project, issues around labor rights seemed to be evolving as the project went on, especially considering that CHC is still adapting to operations in Ecuador. Unable to find more meaningful information on the Internet, even with powerful search engines, I planned a visit to the project site prior to carrying out my formal research in order to make contacts and obtain permission to conduct field research there. In December 2013, I flew to Ecuador for the first time and stayed for a month for my preliminary research.

## My First Encounter with the Field Site

At first, I was only able to make contact with one Chinese person working in Quito, a UT alumnus employed by China's development bank system there. He introduced me to a friend of his in a management position at CHC and I quickly realized that the Chinese expatriate business circle in Quito is very small and everyone in it knows one another. I seized the opportunity and made an appointment with the manager to talk about my research plan. I nervously introduced myself as a student researcher wanting to learn about the project's operation and people's experiences there for my thesis. The young





Photo by Ruijie Peng

Work site inside tunnel housing generators.





Construction scene of diversion dam in river.

manager was very open-minded and supportive. Unexpectedly, I was granted access to visit the project site for a week.

On that first visit, I took a four-hour car ride from Quito to the project camp 200 kilometers to the east, where many rivers pour a deluge of water down the flank of the Andes Mountains into the Amazon basin. As we neared the camp entrance, the driver carefully turned right into a paved road that led to a metal gate guarded by men in black suits, who sat in a booth. The gate was barely recognizable if one did not already know that it opened onto a construction camp. To the right side of the paved road, there is a large poster announcing the hydroelectric project that CHC is constructing. To the left of the gate, a brown stone pedestal with curved Chinese characters spells the name of the company. The driver pulled over as a security guard approached the car, writing pad in hand. The driver rolled down the window, handing his ID card to the guard, who jotted down the number on a sign-in sheet. The guard then looked around inside the car, glancing at each passenger while making eye contact. Drawing back his suspicious and inquisitive look, he waved his hand to let us in.

Entering the camp, we encountered long and winding green metal fences that encircled a group of buildings, clearly marking the boundary with the outside. At first glance, I caught sight of a giant, factory-like building with a blue rooftop, machinery, and big trucks. I heard the clanking noise of metal and the sound of machines running as we drove along the path. This is the mechanical workshop where custom-fitted construction parts are made. As we proceeded, we encountered another gate guarded by more men in the same uniforms, employees of a private security company. After the guards

allowed us to pass this gate, I saw what formed a sharp contrast to the disorderly and informal look of the factories near the camp entrance: work facilities and accommodations were beautifully laid out. At that moment, I realized we were officially in the camp.

On the left side of the driveway there was a semi-oval parking lot with buses and several cars. On the other side, a beige concrete structure with blue metal rooftops served as the office building. There was a lot of buzz in this area from new personnel check-ins and material arrivals in front the office. This part of the camp, and particularly this office building, is where most of my work unfolded in the summer of 2014.

### Uncovering a Different Story

This first visit to the field site substantiated and transformed my research interests and my sense of purpose. Before going there, my initial and broad interest was to look at performances and impacts of Chinese investments on a human level. I had read volumes of papers and essays about the development of Sino–Latin American relations and seen figures from the recent period of vibrant trade exchange and foreign direct investment between the two regions. However, being on the ground in an actual project site was a strong reminder that researchers and scholars have not had access to evaluate the human impacts and interactions of a Chinese construction project, especially one in which people of different nationalities and cultures converge and work together.

Although I only stayed in the field for a brief observation period during my first visit, I quickly developed a trusting relationship with

the young Chinese engineers and interpreters of my age group. The more I got to know individuals who work on the project, the stronger became my desire to investigate their work experiences there. There is a popular perception that Chinese modernization projects operate similarly to earlier capitalist projects, controlling local resources and population. For example, the sparse reports I was able to find online record Ecuadorian workers' grievances over food quality. However, my stay and close interaction with Chinese staff and workers on the site gave me the impression that this project, including its problems, has characteristics that are distinct from previous such projects. My initial visit exposed to me a more complicated and counterintuitive side of the story about workers' treatment and the labor rights provisions of Chinese nationals in the project. While it is true that the Chinese expatriate workers and staff, who number close to 1,300 people, receive significantly higher salaries than workers in China, they do not enjoy the same labor rights as their Ecuadorian counterparts on the project. In fact, many Chinese engineers confided that they feel as though they are working in a prison because all of their work and their lives revolve around the project and its progress. By the end of my first visit to the field site, my intention to look at human interactions had further materialized into an investigation of reasons that contribute to differential work treatment, labor rights provisions, and the disparate workplace experiences of Chinese and Ecuadorians.

### The Challenge of Starting Field Work

In the summer of 2014, with the intention of documenting Chinese and Ecuadorian workers' experiences with the workplace and with each other, I returned to the field with written interview scripts, a matrix of employee categories, and numbers of interviews that I wanted to conduct during my fieldwork. Although almost everybody in the office knew I was a student carrying out research for my thesis, people tended to regard me as a new interpreter doing an internship with the company in our interactions. During the entire process of my fieldwork, I stayed in the technical department's office while people were working during the day.

My first job was to understand the organization of people in the project. At the CHC site, male Chinese managers and engineers occupy most managerial positions, with the exception of two Ecuadorian heads of department. Chinese manual laborers, all of whom are certified skilled workers,<sup>2</sup> occupy leadership positions over lower-skilled Ecuadorians on their construction teams. No women work as either administrators or manual laborers. Chinese women, about 2 percent of the entire workforce, work as interpreters, accountants, and heavy machine technicians. Local Ecuadorian women largely work as maintenance staff on the lowest rung of the hierarchy. Figure 1 roughly represents the schematic job distribution.

My second task was to immerse myself in the daily rhythm of work at the project. Many of my informants reported the normal workday as being repetitive and monotonous. All employees observe a strict work schedule. People go to the canteen for breakfast between 6 and 8 A.M. and start work at 8. They have a two-hour lunch break between noon and 2 P.M. before resuming work until 6 P.M. Since the office has such a strict atmosphere, I took advantage of my time there to observe how people work individually, with other people and parties, or during negotiations at meetings. Apart



Figure 1. Job Hierarchy Distribution

Yellow lines denote formal hierarchy while red dotted lines denote informal hierarchy.

from participant observation, I carried out interviews after formal working hours, usually at night in the office building, where most people chose to spend their time. My informants included people who work at all levels in the job distribution shown in Figure 1. Before I began the interviews, I designed a series of questions on topics ranging from daily work routines to employees' feelings about working conditions, experiences communicating with co-workers, and the ways in which they settle complaints and grievances with the company. I then started to make interview appointments with people I already knew and to whom I had easier access.

In the beginning, my informants and I were nervous and tense because I was going through a rather rigid list of questions and their trust in me was yet not fully established. I remember talking with an Ecuadorian worker who felt some bitterness about his treatment. When it came to answering my question about the ways in which he went about resolving these grievances, he suddenly became very mechanical and answered in a politically correct way: he said he only went to the human resources office with complaints and waited for responses. He avoided talking about the small labor unions that existed among the workers and other informal modes of protest at workplace, of which I only became aware later on.

The same thing happened with Chinese informants. It was hard to get them to talk about their true feelings toward the project, especially their negative experiences. The largest problem was always trust. They assumed that I would communicate their negative comments to the company, which could get them in trouble.

As time passed and mutual trust was built, the Chinese informants who were closer to me often asked me to turn off the recorder so that they could talk about their past protests and attempts to negotiate their treatment with the company. Indeed, many of the moments of disclosure took place off the record. People would share feelings about working on this remote project where their personal and financial freedom were largely restricted despite the fact that they could earn good money. They talked about how difficult it was to communicate with Chinese bosses or Ecuadorian workers while working side by side at the construction site. They also told me of their struggles to maintain relationships with significant others or family while working afar.

Being immersed in the field allowed me to fully use my intuition and capture assorted details. After almost three months in Ecuador, various kinds of information seemed to congregate in my mind, each piece representing part of a larger mosaic that needed to be assembled. But while I was in the field, I was unable to take a step back to see the entire picture. Only after leaving the field was I able to reflect and begin to process the huge amount of information I had recorded, allowing me to identify recurring themes that would gradually grow into the pillars of my thesis. These themes include labor control through division, perceptions of rights among different subjects, and gender.

### Initial Research Findings

#### Labor Control Through Division

Entering the project camp day after day, I began to feel the tight control the company imposes on physical boundaries as well as on people's movements in the space. The assignments of office space, canteens, and dormitories all follow an obscure underlying principle. The more I observed both the physical layout and the organization of personnel, the more I understood the employer's intention of differentiating the population according

to nationality, professional rank, and gender. I was able to observe how the company's spatial practices influence the ways in which employees behave in the spaces. For example, the crowded male barracks and the more spacious senior apartments discourage association and communication among people who rank differently in the professional hierarchy.

Meanwhile, the organization of personnel is also highly divided according to nationality. Chinese men dominate the management and technical levels. On the workers' level, Chinese manual laborers supervise a much larger population of Ecuadorian manual laborers at the actual construction site. I initially got the sense that this was because Chinese migrant workers in Ecuador are more technically adroit in their skills, whereas many Ecuadorian workers have little training, having only shifted from subsistence farming or other informal occupations to become contract workers. However, after reviewing more literature on work control while crafting my thesis, I gradually came to grasp a more complicated reality: both the spatial and the organizational practices at the site contain principles for division that in effect constitute a form of social control that differentially disciplines staff and workers.

### Perceptions of Rights Among Workers

As the construction project brings 20 percent of its labor from China, male Chinese manual laborers have become the largest economic migrant population to participate in Ecuador's new trend of economic globalization. In this new space, Chinese and Ecuadorian laborers work together, and while Chinese capital and the Chinese construction company may mean the domination of Chinese personnel in the project, I found the Chinese migrant laborers to be locked in the same predicament that has always confronted migrant workers. Typically, workers laboring in foreign lands are paid lower wages than their local counterparts and experience more powerlessness in negotiations for better treatment (Sassen 1990). In the case of the Chinese employees, these conditions strangely replicate themselves even though it is Chinese transnational capital that operates the project. The wages of the Chinese workers are lower than those of Ecuadorian personnel with the same qualifications. In addition, the Chinese workers have less leverage to negotiate for better work treatment than either Ecuadorians or Chinese workers employed domestically in China. However, in terms of salary and professional status, working abroad has afforded these Chinese migrants the chance



Chinese and Ecuadorian workers stand in hard hats among rocky debris at the site of a hydroelectric construction project.

Photo by Ruijie Peng



to earn considerably higher wages and elevated job status compared to working inside China. Thus, Chinese employees' transnational movement to Ecuador and their work in an international setting produces a set of complex conditions that influence the production of social relations—that is, how they relate to co-workers of a different nationality and to their superiors at work, based on how much power they believe themselves to possess. With such contrasting perceptions of rights between Chinese and Ecuadorian workers, I further explore in my thesis how and why Chinese workers are made to take and stay in certain job positions in the process of labor division.

### Gender

Before entering the field, I never imagined that gender would be such an important dimension of my research experience. Yet the moment I saw the green fence around the female staff dormitory, setting that space and its occupants apart from other residents of the camp, I began to consider the importance of this lens in my understanding of the project.

Of the twenty barrack dormitory units for manual workers and entry-level staff, only two house Chinese female staff, as well as a small number of Ecuadorian women from distant provinces. The Chinese construction company explained that the fence segregating the women's dormitories was built to protect women from male harassment, yet female workers living inside the fence appeared to feel more restricted than protected by it. In fact, the presence of the fence caused many women to be highly sensitive about whether or not their female colleagues were inside the fence at the right time, especially at night. Women living inside the camp gossiped among themselves about other women who did not observe the curfews and schedules. This talk often eventually spread outside the fence. Among Chinese women in particular, I found that instead of being a source of care and protection, the fence functioned as a pressure seeking to discipline their behavior and their social interactions according to Chinese patriarchal standards and criteria for women's comportment.

My observations and interviews helped me identify revealing patterns in discourses

and practices surrounding female workers. I found that patriarchal and gender-based characteristics of capital operations in general, and the distinct cultural features of Chinese modernization projects in Ecuador in particular, underlie the patterns of interaction that women experience in the project. By exploring the influence of the fence on women's perceptions and experiences, I sought to explain the gendered aspects of their interactions with the company and with one another. In my thesis, I posit that the fence, as part of the objective realities women face, can shed light on the cultural politics of labor control.

### Difficulties and Triumphs

With these recurring themes in mind, I returned from the field at the end of the summer with loads of field notes, interviews, memories, and feelings gathered while working in Ecuador. Toward the end of my stay in the field, I was approached by the manager who had introduced me to the site. He asked me whether I had gathered enough data for my thesis, politely hinting that it might be a good time to leave the field.

At that moment, I reflected upon my own social positions and privileges, which had granted me access to the site, as well as my own perspectives and biases. As a Chinese national, I was able to gain access to a highly restricted field site because of my personal networks and the trust bestowed upon me based solely on my nationality and skin color. As a woman, I developed close ties with some female employees on the site who allowed me a glimpse into their lives. They treated me as a good friend. Sitting in front of the computer and writing my thesis, I once again feel very lucky to have virtually stumbled upon access to the field site, which might have been completely elusive to me—part of the unpredictability factor for all field workers. At the same time, I am exploring the best way to interpret, respond to, and connect the stories, trust, doubts, and friendships that I encountered in the field so as to shape them into a meaningful mosaic that tells a story.

Just as Aihwa Ong (2010) declares when reflecting on her writing about Malaysian female factory workers, I do not aspire to “represent” the meanings my informants make about their lives, nor do I claim to

fully understand the scope of the complicated capital operations and social relations. Writing the above account, I came to see my work as an effort to piece together different facets of social life into a cohesive whole while cognizant of how impossible it is to achieve a coherent and refined vision of the social reality and the impacts Chinese of transnational modernization projects at the human level.

In my thesis, I have attempted to tell a story about the ways in which Chinese transnational modernization projects operate in Ecuador, emphasizing impacts on the human actors and their social relations. Now, the more I revisit the field through my notes, memoirs, and interviews, the more I realize I am just beginning to learn about the labor issues emerging from economic and social development both at home and abroad. 🌟

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*Ruijie Peng is a 2015 graduate of the LLILAS MA program. She conducted her field research in the Northern Amazon region of Ecuador during the summer of 2014. Beginning in fall 2015, she will pursue a PhD in sociology at The University of Texas at Austin.*

### Notes

1. The company name, as well as names of the project and project site, are fictitious due to the company's concerns for privacy and to protect the informants' identities.
2. Chinese manual laborers are selected to work overseas based on their qualifications. They must have professional certification and considerable work experience to qualify for work abroad. In contrast, most Ecuadorian workers come from rural backgrounds without the specific skills the project requires.

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# Latin American Jewish Studies at The University of Texas at Austin

by NAOMI LINDSTROM

I

IN RECENT YEARS, The University of Texas at Austin has emerged as a hub of activity for researchers, students, and lecture-goers interested in Jewish Latin America. Yet the study of Latin American Jewish cultures and com-

munities at UT dates back to the early 1980s. Seth L. Wolitz, the L.D., Marie and Edwin Gale Chair Emeritus of Judaic Studies, had just arrived to direct the Jewish studies program, and encouraged faculty to conduct and supervise research, offer courses, and organize events on modern Diasporic topics, including the lesser studied Jewish communities. The new director's mantra was "Let a thousand Jewish flowers bloom." At his urging, I began teaching a course on Latin American Jewish creative intellectuals.

It was during these early enthusiastic, though still lean, years that Jacobo Sefamí and Rodrigo Cánovas, who would become prominent scholars of Latin American Jewish literature, earned their doctorates in the Hispanic Literatures program at UT, though for their dissertations they chose non-Jewish topics. In the mid-1990s, UT became host for the house listserv of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA), lajsa-list, which serves as a central online source for new publications, calls for papers, research queries, and other announcements useful to those in the field. In 1999, Lydia M. Gil became the first UT student to complete a dissertation entirely on a Latin American Jewish topic.

These activities could find a home at UT in great part thanks to the presence of the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection. The Benson holds such treasures as a set of issues of the Buenos Aires-based magazine *Judaica*, edited by Salomón Resnik, a mainstay of Jewish-Argentine intellectual life during the 1930s and 1940s.

While the Benson Collection attracts numerous visitors eager to view the Sor Juana archive and the draft manuscript of Julio Cortázar's novel *Rayuela*, only a few specialists know that it also houses a significant collection of Yiddish manuscripts. The Benson librarians—in particular, successive acquisitions librarians Donald Gibbs and David Block—go out of their way to be in contact with faculty, including those in Jewish studies, and to keep up to date on their research needs. While librarian Margo Gutierrez covers Mexican American and U.S. Latina/o studies, she has gener-

ously supplied me over the years with many valuable bibliographic leads in Latin American Jewish studies.

## The Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies

Though the groundwork for Latin American Jewish studies at UT was laid in the late twentieth century, the rapid growth of this area has been made possible by the founding, in September 2007, of the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies (SCJS). A large matching grant from the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation brought unprecedented support for Jewish studies at UT and created

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Liana Strasberg (Argentina); mixed on paper.

a physical office for the program, which had not had its own space. As founding director of the SCJS, Robert H. Abzug—the Audre and Bernard Rapoport Regents Chair of Jewish Studies who has been the center’s indefatigable fundraiser—has from the beginning placed a special emphasis on the study of Jewish life in the Americas, including Latin America, the United States, and Canada.

In its early years, the center made substantial moves toward integrating Latin American Jewish studies further. The SCJS was involved in the faculty recruitment of historian Miriam Bodian, whose scholarship has shed important light on the Inquisition in both the Iberian Peninsula and the New World, as well as post-1492 Sephardic communities. It began hosting such visiting speakers as Cuban-U.S. anthropologist Ruth Behar, Latin Americanist historian Leo Spitzer, who is known for his conceptualization of collective memory, and Argentine visual artist Mirta Kupferminc, with her Kabbalistic themes. Alan Astro, the expert on Yiddish in Latin America, has been not only a speaker at the SCJS but also our friend and neighbor, since he teaches at Trinity University in San Antonio.

In 2011, the SCJS made its largest commitment yet to this emerging field of study by successfully bidding to host the 16th

International Research Conference of LAJSA. This event, which took place June 9–11, 2013, attracted over 100 people from Latin America, the United States, Israel, and Europe. One participant, Professor Stephen A. Sadow of Northeastern University, subsequently donated to the Schusterman Center a one-of-a-kind collection of artists’ books containing the work of fourteen Latin American Jewish artists whom Sadow had persuaded to create original artwork in dialogue with fourteen texts of Latin American Jewish poetry. The resulting artworks are housed in the SCJS, which Sadow considers “the perfect home” for them, since they are made available to researchers and displayed on a rotating basis. (Some of the images from the collection illustrate this article, while the entire collection may be viewed online at [iris.lib.neu.edu/books/2/](http://iris.lib.neu.edu/books/2/) or in person at the SCJS.)

#### The Gale Collaborative for the Study of Jewish Life in the Americas

Since the LAJSA conference, the SCJS has continued to develop its Latin Americanist activities. The plan of studying Jews throughout the Americas has recently been formalized as the Edwin Gale





Adrián Levy Memún (Argentina); acrylic and pencil on paper.

Collaborative for the Study of Jewish Life in the Americas. “The collaborative represents a powerful step in fulfilling our founding vision of becoming a crossroads for the study of Jews in the Western Hemisphere,” Abzug notes. This initiative has brought to UT such speakers as Achy Obejas, the Cuban-U.S. writer, LGBT activist, and

descendant of Caribbean crypto-Jews. A new annual competition, patterned on the Benson’s travel grants for Mexican and Central American scholars, funds a Latin American researcher pursuing Latin American Jewish topics to spend a short period in residence at UT, utilizing the Benson Collection and other resources. The 2014–2015

visiting scholar was historian Bruno Feitler of the Universidade Federal de São Paulo (see sidebar); in 2015–2016, the SCJS will host a recognized literary scholar, Lyslei Nascimento of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais.

Moreover, preparations are currently under way for the first major event of the newly



established Gale Collaborative, the Symposium on Jewish Life in the Americas, scheduled for November 1–2, 2015. This two-day event, which will be free and open to the public, will be an interdisciplinary gathering of scholars of Jewish communities and cultural production in Latin America, the United States, and Canada. Rather than

read papers, the participants are taking a comparative look at the regions by discussing a set of questions, with the exchange of ideas beginning well before the dates of the conference. The concept is not just to stage a one-time event but rather to link together a network of scholars who will remain in contact and continue the dialogue begun in the lead-up to the symposium.

#### Teaching and Research of UT Scholars

In addition to these collective efforts, Latin American Jewish studies at The University of Texas also includes the teaching and research of individual faculty members and graduate students. The recently retired Seth L. Wolitz consistently took care to include a Brazilian or Spanish American component in his wide-ranging teaching and research on Jewish topics. Currently, several faculty offer courses in the field in addition to my own, among them SCJS lecturer Amelia Rosenberg Weinreb; Professor Miriam Bodian; and such visiting lecturers as the current Israel Postdoctoral Fellow, Sebastián Klor, a researcher of Latin American immigration to Israel. Courses offered in recent semesters have included Introduction to Jewish Latin America, Latin American Jewish Writers, Jewish Cuba, and Jewish Diaspora: The Americas and Palestine.

In any given year, several Jewish studies faculty members and students are engaged in Latin Americanist research. Miriam Bodian's current work deals with a seventeenth-century Inquisition case that is transatlantic, that of a French-born *converso* whose family settled in Amsterdam, from where he traveled to Dutch Brazil. He was later detained in Portuguese Brazil and sent to Lisbon for trial. Bodian notes: "The case is of interest because the prisoner combined ideas from his French Jesuit education, his Jewish knowledge, and his exposure to radical ideas in France and the Netherlands to argue his case on the grounds of freedom of conscience."

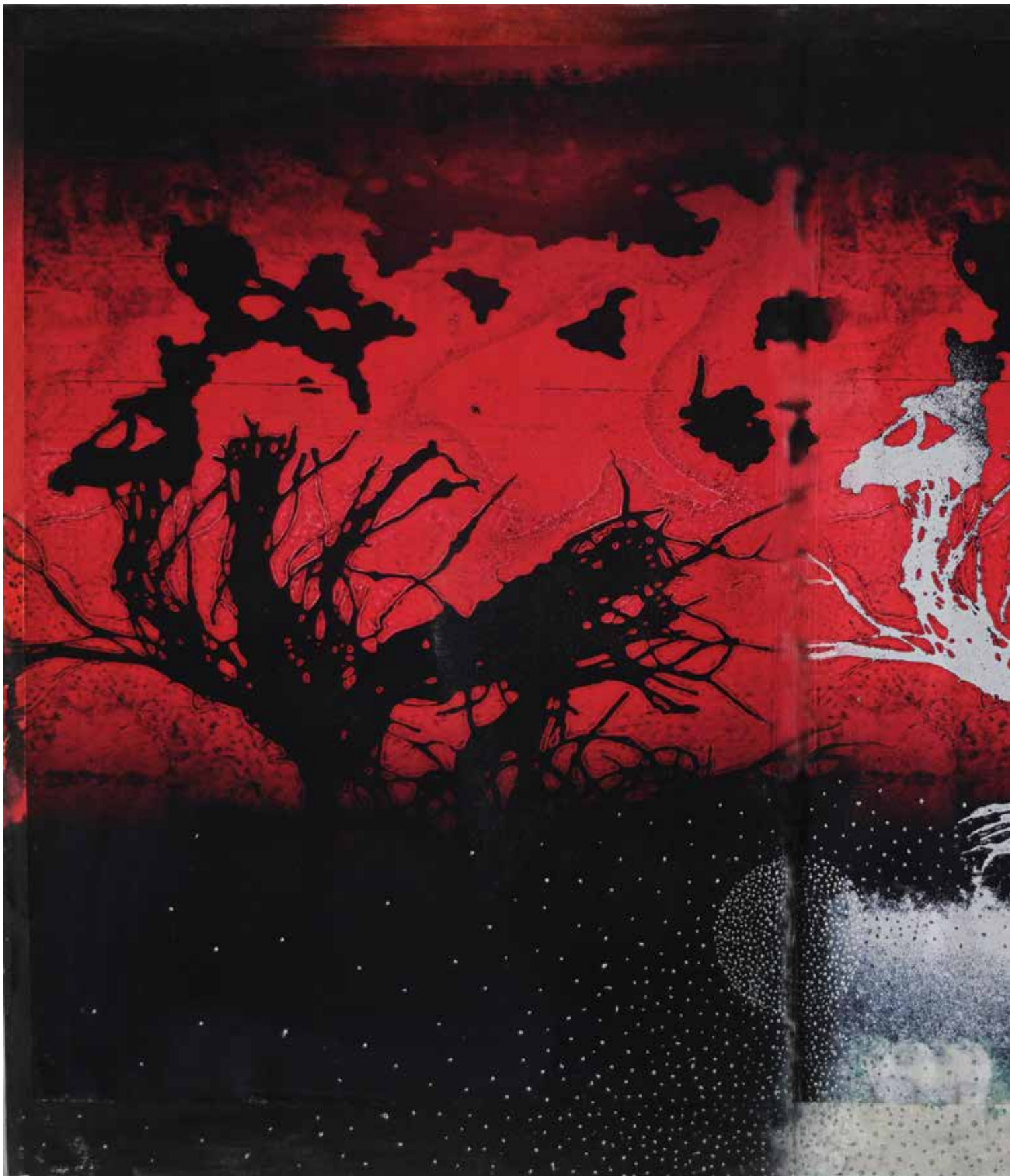
Amelia Weinreb carries out research on Jewish communities in both Cuba and Israel. One of her current research interests involves considering Jewish Cuba, which attracts numerous international visitors, as a contact zone. As she sets forth the concept: "I study how Jewish Cuba no longer constitutes a single cultural object of analysis, but

rather is best understood as a transnational 'contact zone,' characterized by the tensions and connections of collective affect, a gift economy, and shifting senses of Jewish peoplehood occurring through encounter." She is also seeking to discover trends in the immigration of Cuban Jews to Israel. Weinreb must rely on personal stories for this research because, as she explains, "Since the early 1990s, a non-disclosure agreement shared between the Israeli government and Cuban authorities, and respected by the Jewish Agency, ensures that no party publicizes cases of Cuban aliyah [immigration to Israel]."

While the SCJS does not have a graduate program of its own, graduate students from various programs are associated with it, including some Latin Americanists. Raelene Wyse, a doctoral student in the Program in Comparative Literature, has been pursuing research on Jewish writers and filmmakers in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. She has studied issues of identity in Jewish-Argentine film and the career of the entertainer "Blackie" (Paloma Efron), who made her name singing "black jazz," yet also sang with a Yiddish choir group. Her master's report focused on the Jewish allusions in Chilean poet David Rosenmann-Taub's 1949 collection of poems, *Cortejo y epinicio*. In his work, Rosenmann-Taub (born 1927) incorporates Jewishness as well as pagan, Christian, Catholic, and other mystical elements in heterodoxical forms. Through these forms, his speakers raise questions about the existence of God and the role of prayer.

Wyse spoke highly of the resources available to her at UT, noting that the Benson's Yiddish collection has expanded her research interests. "As a student at The University of Texas at Austin, I am grateful to walk to the library and find up-to-date scholarship on these areas as well as works by the authors within them, from biographies about Paloma Efron to Daniel Burman's films to a first edition of Rosenmann-Taub's *Cortejo y epinicio*," Wyse said. "This year, I also learned about the library's collection of works in Yiddish from Latin America. I began studying Yiddish to trace the connections between Jewish cultures in Europe and Latin America. As part of this research, I look forward to reading through this collection in the future."









Other doctoral students whose research includes some element of Latin American Jewish studies include Jonathan Fleck (Comparative Literature) and Stephanie Malak (Spanish and Portuguese); the latter's dissertation-in-progress covers two Catholic and two Jewish writers. Malak summarizes her research: "I am examining the revelation and concealment of Jewish identity in two Latin American Jewish writers from the mid-twentieth century, particularly in relation to their literary treatment of death and mysticism. In the case of Russian-born Jacobo Fijman, I analyze the act of conversion from Judaism to Catholicism and the effects it has on the Jewishness expressed in his poetry. In the seminal work of Jewish Brazilian author Clarice Lispector, *A paixão segundo G.H.*, I examine the process of self-realization in the protagonist to reveal which Jewish allusions engender a mystical reading of this text."

#### My Involvement

Over the decades that I have been involved in this area of study, my outlook and approach have changed. Like many scholars in the field, I began as a Latin Americanist, in my particular case by earning a doctorate in Spanish American literature, and only later began to add Jewish topics to my work. My 1989 book, *Jewish Issues in Argentine Literature: From Gerchunoff to Szichman* (University of Missouri Press), was written from this perspective. In addition, this early work reveals the influence of the sociological thought that I had absorbed as the offspring of a sociologist. The book shows, through analyses of prose narratives and poetry, how Jewish Argentine intellectuals slowly moved from an insecure new-arrival position, characterized by an anxious desire not to offend the "host" nation, to a more self-assured stance that allowed for critical questioning.

Since this early project, my intellectual center has been shifting further into Jewish studies, as I came to participate more often in Jewish studies conferences, sought to strengthen my general Jewish knowledge, and became better acquainted with the most salient issues and the thought of influential scholars in the field. This is why, after Director Abzug had the Schusterman Center up and running, I was so happy to accept his invitation to serve as associate director. It is still highly unusual for a Latin Americanist to play a central role in a Jewish studies program, though with the rapid growth of Latin American Jewish studies I hope that it will become less exceptional.

As a researcher, I wanted to develop a project that would require me to link my own work to Jewish thought, texts, and scholarship. The result has been my current project on the transformations of prophetic and apocalyptic discourse in the work of certain Latin American Jewish writers and filmmakers. These creative intellectuals, seeking an expression for their visionary tendencies, tend to adapt to the modern age the harangues, invective, threats of punishment, and promises of redemption found in the books of the prophets. In addition, some of them create their own versions of the psychedelic imagery found in apocalyptic literature, which, although it is today most commonly associated with the Book of Revelation that closes the New Testament, originated as, and may still be argued to constitute, a fundamentally Jewish genre.

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Leonor Coifman (Argentina); mixed on paper.

While prophetic expression remains recognizable down through the centuries, the content has changed greatly; none of the creators whose work I have examined are concerned over the polytheism, idolatry in the literal sense, and sexual transgressions that enraged the canonical prophets. Some writers decry the new sins that industrialized society is committing against the Earth. Though they are all Jewish creators, a number of them are uninhibited about linking their works to the New Testament, especially the fierier passages of the gospels and Revelation. Some appear most attracted to the ethical aspect of prophecy, while others are clearly most fascinated by the splendid and grotesque images revealed to visionaries. So far, I have published or have forthcoming analyses of work by the Argentines Jacobo Fijman, César Tiempo, Luisa Futoransky, and Mario Satz; the Brazilians Moacyr Scliar, Samuel Rawet, and Clarice Lispector; the Cuban-American José Kozer; and the Chilean-French Alejandro Jodorowsky.

### For the Future

In fall 2015, Abzug and I will team-teach a new interdisciplinary honors course, *Jewish Identities in the Americas*, which will provide a comparative look at Jewish arts, culture, and identity throughout the Americas. Students in the course will benefit from the aforementioned symposium on Jewish Life in the Americas. Also scheduled for fall 2015 is the visit to UT of David Unger, the New York-based Jewish writer who was recently awarded the Miguel Ángel Asturias National Prize in Literature in his native Guatemala.

Other projects still in the works include a plan to stream on the SCJS website the documentary *Tango: una historia con judíos*, written by radio announcer and Jewish tango expert José Judkovski and directed by Gabriel Pomeranec. The eventual plan is to host a collection of documentary films on Latin American Jewish topics.

A more general long-range plan is to forge closer links between Jewish studies at UT and the Latin American studies and resources centered at LLILAS Benson. A step in this direction was the panel discussion “Nisman’s Death,” jointly sponsored and coordinated by the SCJS, the LLILAS Argentine Studies Program, and the Latin American Initiative of the UT School of Law.

In all, Latin American Jewish studies has begun to come out of the shadows nationally and internationally. As Robert Abzug has said, “we at the center are extremely proud to be a leading light in this awakening of interest, especially within the comparative context of all the Americas.” 🌟

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*Naomi Lindstrom is Gale Family Foundation professor in Jewish Arts and Culture, professor of Spanish and Portuguese, and associate director of the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies at UT Austin. Her recent books are Early Spanish American Narrative (2004) and The Social Conscience of Latin American Writing (1998). She is the coordinator of the website and listserv of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA).*

### More About the Latin American Jewish Studies Association

The LAJSA website, hosted on the College of Liberal Arts server at UT ([www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/lajsa](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/lajsa)), includes a registry of theses and dissertations in Latin American Jewish studies, a filmography of movies with Latin American Jewish content, and an archive of relevant images, including art and photography.

### BRAZILIAN HISTORIAN BRUNO FEITLER, RECIPIENT OF FIRST SCJS RESEARCH TRAVEL AWARD



In October 2014, the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies welcomed Brazilian historian Bruno Feitler as the first recipient of its annual research travel award for a scholar based in Latin America. The award enables a visiting scholar to conduct research on Latin American Jewish topics at The University of Texas at Austin for a period of one to two weeks. Feitler teaches history at the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP).

At a talk in the center’s conference room, Feitler discussed his research on Jews and Judaism in Dutch Brazil. The Dutch controlled much of Northeast Brazil from 1624 to 1625, and 1630 to 1654; the synagogue in Recife, state of Pernambuco, was the first in the Americas. When the descendants of forcibly baptized Jews in Spain and Portugal began fleeing the Inquisition in the early modern period, Amsterdam and Recife were among the few places where they could establish openly Jewish communities.

Feitler digs deep into the historical records of two continents to explore the complex results and repercussions of forced conversion and the actions of the Inquisition. Many Iberian Peninsula Jews converted to Christianity under duress, and some of these *conversos*, also known as crypto-Jews or *marranos*, gave the appearance of practicing Christianity while secretly continuing Jewish religious observance. Feitler and UT historian Miriam Bodian are intimately familiar with the stories of these early Jews of the Americas and their descendants, stories that still reverberate today among Sephardic Jews as well as among some Latin Americans and U.S. Latinas/os who wonder whether their ancestors might have been crypto-Jews. (The question of why this can be problematic and why Jewish roots are often impossible to substantiate came up after Feitler’s talk, as did a debunking of the notion that certain common Spanish and Portuguese names are indicators of Jewish ancestry.)

Feitler spent much of his time on campus at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, where he consulted numerous publications that are not easily accessible in Brazil. “The Benson gathers an invaluable collection of works regarding Judaism in Latin America,” says Feitler. “My time spent there, thanks to the Schusterman Center, was useful as a way of updating my bibliography on the marrano question in Brazil, one of my subjects of study.”

—Susanna Sharpe

# Student Stories: From Afro-Argentina to Latino Voting Behavior

by SUSANNA SHARPE

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## Prisca Gayles

Prisca Gayles recalls eating delicious soup at a fancy Asian restaurant when she was

a girl. “Pay attention to the different flavors,” said her mother. “What ingredients do you taste?” Prisca and her astute siblings were apparently successful at this endeavor, for her mother was able to recreate the soup at home in the kitchen. Perhaps this same attention to detail and nuances is at work in Prisca’s scholarly endeavors. She is pursuing her PhD in Latin American Studies with a portfolio in African and African Diaspora Studies. She might add a portfolio in Women’s and Gender Studies as well.

Prisca works with Professor Javier Auyero of the Department of Sociology in the area of urban ethnography. Because her research focuses on Afro-Argentines and Afro-descendants in Buenos Aires, she has found the study of critical race theory, as well as the Black Studies Theory and Methods course, to be particularly important.

Various events and circumstances influenced Prisca’s current focus in graduate school. An Oakland, California, native, she recalls being the only Black girl on the swim team at an elite girls’ school as a child. She



Prisca Gayles and Frank Rodriguez.

felt alienated by the jokes the other girls made in the locker room about the appearance of her dry skin. Prisca majored in Hispanic Languages and Literature at the University of Pittsburgh as an undergraduate, where she was drawn to the study of Afro-Cuban culture. While pursuing her

master’s in political science with a certificate in Latin American Studies at the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa, she learned that the state of Florida would not fund student travel to Cuba.

Faced with a dilemma, she quickly found an intriguing solution: a professor told her



about a project through the Cátedra Libre de Estudios Afroargentinos y Afroamericanos at the National University of La Plata called “Retumba Tango: Rediscovering the Black Roots of the Tango.” It was based in Buenos Aires and La Plata. A lifelong dancer with serious performance experience in a wide variety of genres, Prisca found this topic compelling on several levels, including the question of Black identity and blackness in a largely white society. “I became interested in the invisibility of blackness in Argentina,” she says.

When asked how, exactly, the invisibility of blackness manifests itself in Argentine society, Prisca gives several examples. “There are certain terms in Argentine Spanish that connote negativities,” she says. “To say that someone ‘*es una negra*’ means they are conniving or tricky.” Similarly, “*negro de la mierda*” is an insult rooted in racism even if one is not speaking to a Black person. Prisca also refers to “the misconceived notion that Blacks aren’t there, so how could there be racism.”

In Buenos Aires, Prisca attended events organized by Black activists, such as members of Misibamba Argentina, an association of Afro-Argentines who self-identify as being “*del tronco colonial*,” descendants of slaves. Yet as Prisca points out, Afro-Argentines don’t have to be “*del tronco colonial*.” They can be the descendants of Cape Verdeans with Portuguese passports who arrived in the early twentieth century, or any other Afro-descendant person born in Argentina. She says that Argentina is making efforts toward recognizing its minorities, citing the name change of a plaza in Santa Fe, from the Plaza de las Dos Culturas to the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, an initiative of Misibamba. Afro-descendant culture is also celebrated by white Argentines, such as those who participate in candombe sessions in San Telmo while acknowledging the cultural and ethnic roots of this Afro-Argentine musical tradition.

But the question of how Argentines experience and perceive Black culture is complicated when fantasies and idealized portrayals of blackness bump up against everyday lives of Black people. Prisca alludes to the thought of Michael Hanchard in this regard: “You cannot only align behind the politics of Black cultural production because there’s a danger in the exotification and commodification of Black culture, and

it becomes a show and not about the lived experience of Black people.”

When she is not working toward her PhD, Prisca enjoys dance, music, and cooking. She trained in many styles at Dimensions Dance Theater in Oakland and performed with the Pitt Dance Ensemble while earning her bachelor’s. She is also trained as a fitness instructor and has taught kickboxing, Powerlifting, and Cardio Hip-Hop. Her tastes in both music and food are eclectic: she mentions Thai-Indian fusion, and says her musical choices run from Motown, salsa, and bachata to 80s pop and classic rock. Her family roots are artistic and spiritual: her father is a visual artist and a musician; her mother is disabled and training to become a biblical health coach. Prisca is very close to her five siblings, who supported and cheered her over spring break as she donated a kidney to a nephew in need.

#### Frank Rodriguez

It’s hard not to notice LLILAS master’s student Frank Rodriguez when he walks down the hall. At well over 6 feet, he cuts a striking figure and has an outgoing and affable personality to match. His preferred mode of transport on campus is skateboard, the subject of “Pushing Wood,” one of the many rhymes he has written and recorded under the name Mammals Babble in collaboration with a good friend who composes hip-hop beats.

Frank took up the skateboard as a child in Santa Barbara, California. He grew up there with his parents and brother. As a teen, he worked with his father and uncle at a country club, where he bussed tables. He was exposed to César Chávez and issues of immigrants’ rights in high school. As an undergrad at UCLA, he majored in political science and minored in Chicano/Chicana studies, with a focus on labor and workplace studies and civic engagement. He attended UC Berkeley during the summer of his junior year through the PPIA Fellows program, which encourages communities of color to pursue policy studies.

After finishing his bachelor’s degree, Frank entered the Coro Fellowship program in Public Affairs, where he was introduced to political campaign work. “I was sent to Orange County to support Phu Nguyen, a Vietnamese-born candidate running against an anti-immigrant candidate

for the California State Assembly, 68th District. That’s when I really combined labor with politics. I went to work with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and then on a few elections.”

His undergraduate education and work experience in California piqued Frank’s curiosity about comparisons with other states that have large Latino populations. After he spent several years as a college graduate in the workforce, his mother, a house cleaner, encouraged him to go back to school. He chose Texas. “I wanted to come to Texas to see the contrast in Democrats’ role in the state,” he says. “Political and labor organizing in Orange County helped me compare the organizing efforts of Democrat-dominant Los Angeles County and Republican-dominant Orange County. That same curiosity is what brought me out to Texas.”

But instead of continuing in a government or political science program, Frank chose the interdisciplinary LLILAS. “I found a lot of power in liberal arts,” he explains. “I have been on the policy track since undergrad at UCLA. But I wanted to take advantage of my curiosity with the lens of an academic, not an organizer.” Returning to school and choosing LLILAS was a way to “balance reflection and action,” says Frank. “I plan to get back into organizing, and I don’t plan to get a PhD anytime soon.”

For his thesis, Frank examined and mapped electoral behavior Texas in relation to immigration reform politics and Latino politics, looking at how political parties perceive Latino influence. This necessitated delving into the history of the electoral map in Texas and examining changes in voting patterns as well as the catalysts of these changes. “Cartography, the study of maps, has really caught my fascination, especially how maps have evolved for political parties to better canvass voters.”

Frank used Google maps and GIS to synthesize data and create the maps he worked with. Yet despite the quantitative nature of much of his work, he says “It is important to start talking to communities and hear from them rather than just counting.”

Frank, who served as president of ILASSA, the Institute of Latin American Studies Student Association, is good with people, and well suited to starting the conversations with voters that he plans to have. ☀

# Focus on Our Faculty

by SUSANNA SHARPE



## Alfonso Gonzales

The life of a migrant contains many dualities—of culture, of nationality, of language. For some children who migrate with their families, these dualities may escape examination, as the mind of the child has other preoccupations. But Alfonso Gonzales says that even as a child he was aware of straddling two cultures and two countries as he and his family went back and forth between Tijuana, Mexico, and Southern California. This consciousness about his identity led him first to Chicano studies, and ultimately to Latin American studies.

Gonzales is an assistant professor at LLILAS and at the Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies. He is the author of *Reform Without Justice: Latino Migrant Politics and the Homeland Security State* (Oxford, 2013), and describes himself as a U.S. Latina/o studies and Latin American studies scholar. Drawn to the Chicano movement as a young man, he pursued Chicano studies as an undergraduate. Because of his interest in migration, he sought to understand the reasons behind the violence and disdain toward migrants that he had witnessed and experienced growing up, and he came to embrace the study of Latino politics from a transnational perspective.

The 1994 Zapatista Uprising in Mexico drew Gonzales to the topic of Mexican politics. Later, an invitation to El Salvador, where he spent an alternative spring break, deepened his understanding of regional politics and the complex forces that cause so many Mexicans and Central Americans to move northward. Gonzales says that over time he developed a regional perspective, drawing “connections between the effects of neoliberalism on social justice and on the migration of Mexicans and Central Americans.”

Gonzales conducted research for his PhD in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. He has served as an expert witness in asylum cases in California and Texas, including during the current highly controversial detention of families fleeing violence in Central America.

At UT, Gonzales has taken his scholarly pursuits and his commitment to activism for the benefit of migrants and crafted them into a fascinating course offered at the graduate and undergraduate levels. In *Latino Migrations and Asylum*, taught during spring 2015, Gonzales’s students partnered with community organizations to do research for asylum cases. Several of their clients won.

In addition to teaching the undergraduate-level Introduction to Mexican American and Latino Studies course during the 2015–16 school year, Gonzales will also offer Gramscian Thought in the Americas, in which students will read works by Italian Marxist theoretician Antonio Gramsci as well as texts exploring the applications



and limitations of Gramscian theory to the Americas. He will again offer his asylum course.

Asked about his current research, Gonzales responds, “More than any one publication, I am working to execute my research agenda on the politics of migration control and migrant activism in the Americas through the lens of global political economy and political theory. This will come in the form of a series of articles that take up questions that I raised in the conclusion of *Reform Without Justice*. I am also working on a second book, *Justice Denied: Mexicans, Salvadorans, and the Geopolitics of U.S. Asylum Law*, which will focus on U.S. immigration court practices and the fate of deportees and Latino migrant families. In particular, I want to examine why U.S. immigration courts reject the vast majority of Mexican and Salvadoran asylum

claims precisely at a time when human rights conditions in those countries have deteriorated.”

Gonzales hopes that his own humanitarian yet rigorous activist scholarship is motivating to others: “I want Latin American studies students to find a way that their research can have a practical influence on people’s lives, to learn the craft of being a socially engaged intellectual.”

### Lauren Gulbas

What are the messages young Latina/o immigrants perceive about themselves in U.S. society? How might these messages adversely shape self-image and even family dynamics? These are some of the questions that interest anthropologist Lauren Gulbas, an assistant professor at the UT School of Social Work.

Gulbas says that Latina/o youth internalize some of the common negative stereotypes about Latino immigrants, such as the assumption that they lack motivation and don’t know how to work hard. In turn, immigrant parents’ fears about the safety of their children—especially their daughters—feed other immigrant stereotypes, like that of the authoritarian father figure. Gulbas believes that these kinds of challenges, coupled with a lack of opportunities, play a role in family dynamics and can adversely affect immigrant teens. She wants to understand how this works.

The interaction of culture and mental health is at the core of Gulbas’ work. Her PhD is in medical anthropology, and her fascinating doctoral work looks at how women manage stress via the body, for example, through cutting, eating disorders, and cosmetic surgery. These explorations culminated in her dissertation, “Cosmetic Surgery and the Politics of Race, Class, and Gender in Caracas, Venezuela.” In the case of Venezuela, Gulbas found body image to be intimately linked to the psyche, so much so that one psychiatrist there coined the term “scalpel psychiatry.”

The themes of stress and distress continue to be a common thread in Gulbas’ work. She is co-author, with Luis H. Zayas, dean of the School of Social Work, of an article titled “Examining the Interplay of Family, Culture, and Latina Teen Suicidal Behavior” (*Qualitative Health Research* 2015). According to Gulbas, Latina teens attempt suicide at disproportionate rates. Evidence suggests that recent immigration status is a factor in risk for suicidal behavior.

Gulbas believes that increased research is necessary to design effective interventions for this population. She has initiated a pilot project titled “Immigration-related Stress and Suicidal Behavior Among Latino Adolescents.” According to the School of Social Work website, the project will launch a new research program to “explore the effects of immigration-related change on gender and family dynamics and how such change shapes decisions to attempt suicide among adolescent boys and girls from Mexico.”

Her training in anthropology makes Gulbas an ideal fit at the School of Social Work. The program welcomes interdisciplinarity, she says, and espouses the “meet your client where they’re at” philosophy that requires an understanding of the context of culture. During the 2015–16 academic year, she will teach Foundations of Social Justice and Advanced Qualitative Analysis, both graduate-level courses, and Human Behavior in Social Environments, an undergraduate course.

Gulbas will be an invaluable faculty resource for students pursuing the dual master’s degree in social work and Latin American





studies, whose creation was just announced in spring 2015 by the School of Social Work and the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS). Research on the intersection of culture, family, and distress, and how these play out in the lives of young immigrants, represents just one possible avenue of study in this promising new program.

### Benjamín Ibarra Sevilla

Benjamín Ibarra Sevilla has spent a lot of time in late-Gothic churches. He is not a casual visitor to these vast structures, who might stroll in and crane his neck to take in the splendor of the ribbed vaults high above, or fleetingly ponder the enormous effort that must have gone into their construction: removing stone from a quarry, transporting it, shaping it, and assembling the impossibly heavy pieces of chiseled stone in just the right way so that a structure could withstand the test of centuries.

Instead, Ibarra has devoted his career to examining such churches and other historical buildings in the minutest detail, and in some cases this work has led to restoration projects that replicate the centuries-old construction techniques of their creators.

An architect trained in building restoration, Ibarra is assistant professor at the UT School of Architecture. He is also author of the bilingual volume *El Arte de la Cantería Mixteca / The Art of Mixtec Stonecutting* and creator of a traveling exhibition of the same name, which won the University Co-op's 2014–15 Creative Research Award.

The book and the exhibition focus on three sixteenth-century churches in the Mixteca region of southern Mexico whose construction involved the building of complex late-Gothic ribbed vaults.

At UT's School of Architecture (SOA), Ibarra has a full teaching load of 15 hours. His courses include Design Studio, an advanced course for graduate students and advanced undergrads that emphasizes historic preservation; Building Technology, a graduate-level course often taken by interior design and historical preservation students as well as some engineering students; Graphic Documentation, in which historical preservation students learn to document existing historic buildings via measurements and actual practice; and From Traits to Form Performance, a seminar offered at both graduate and undergrad levels that focuses on the study of vaulting systems (domes, arches) and the geometric foundation of how these structures work.

Should we assume that Ibarra has no spare time for additional pursuits, we would be wrong. In an upcoming project through the School of Architecture, he will be part of a design studio examining conservation alternatives at Badlands National Park, South Dakota, looking at the park through the lens of cultural landscapes, a term defined by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee as “combined works of nature and humankind” that “express a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment.” Says Ibarra, “These are landscapes that have meaning and significance in a culture, and the question is how to insert architecture into the landscape in a way that honors what is already there.”

Ibarra explains that the architecture at Badlands was part of Mission 66, a 1950–60s era program of the U.S. National Park Service that introduced architecture into national parks with the purpose of dramatically expanding visitor services. In Badlands, the project successfully introduced mid-century architecture into the park. The National Park Service approached UT's Historical Preservation Program about participating in a project that will update the park's facilities. Fourteen students, along with Ibarra and other SOA faculty, will visit Badlands in September as part of a multidisciplinary team. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center will participate as well, advising on landscaping and native species. The team, says Ibarra, “will brainstorm the future of the park.”

Ibarra documents his work, as well as the world around him, in striking photographs. The exhibition *Restoring Cultural Monuments: Oaxaca, Mexico* assembles photos taken by Ibarra and others of a project that restored sixteenth- and seventeenth-century buildings in Oaxaca using the same building technology that was used when they were built. Thus, the stone was quarried and carved by hand, and there was minimal use of modern technology such as cranes. “The aim is to preserve the buildings' structural integrity,” Ibarra explains; the use of these original building methods is the best way to do this.

More than 900 images from this restoration project will be made available online through the Artstor Digital Library, which is partnering with the UT School of Architecture to archive the collection. They will also be archived by the SOA's online Visual Resources Collection. As for Ibarra's other photographic work, we are delighted to publish his striking nocturnal photo of Mexico City on the cover of this tenth anniversary issue. 🌟

# LLILAS Benson News

## VISITING ACADEMICS

The LLILAS Visiting Academics programs bring new perspectives and regional insights to the study of Latin America. Distinguished Latin American scholars are brought to The University of Texas at Austin to teach courses or a set of classes, sharing their expertise and facilitating the exchange of ideas.

During the 2014–2015 academic year, LLILAS Benson welcomed two visiting scholars. **Claudia Cardoso-Martins** is professor of psychology at the Federal University of Minas Gerais in Brazil, and taught a course in the Department of Psychology through the UT International Office. **Margarita Huayhua** of Peru came to campus through the post-doctoral Mellon Sawyer Research Fellowship, co-sponsored by the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Program (NAIS). A native Quechua speaker, Huayhua participated in Mellon Sawyer symposia and presented the public lecture “Home Birth, Home Invasions: Encroaching on the Household’s Sovereignty in the Andes.”

## BENSON LATIN AMERICAN COLLECTION

In December 2014, **Dr. Julianne Gilland** was named Associate Director for Scholarly Resources at LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections. As associate director, Gilland will fill the chief leadership role at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection. Dr. Gilland joined LLILAS Benson as Special Collections Curator in January 2013 after serving as Deputy Director of the Robbins Collection, a rare books and manuscripts collection at UC Berkeley. Her work as curator has been fundamental to the Benson’s collaboration with LLILAS in various ways. In researching and mounting exhibitions that showcase the Benson’s holdings, she has brought both well-known and lesser-known library treasures into public view. Collaborations with Latin Americanist faculty have led to exhibitions whose content complements scholarly programming, such as the annual Lozano Long Conference. Gilland’s programming work with campus and local cultural institutions and community organizations, including the Austin Public Library and Austin Independent School District, has raised public awareness not only of the Benson, but of Latin American arts, culture, and politics throughout Austin and beyond the Forty Acres.

Gilland received her BA from the University of Notre Dame and her PhD in history from the University of California, Berkeley, where she specialized in early modern Spain and Spanish America.

## NEW AFFILIATED FACULTY

Six faculty members have announced their affiliation with the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies. We are proud to serve as the main intellectual space for interdisciplinary collaboration among UT Latin Americanists on campus. LLILAS has 160 affiliated faculty across UT departments and colleges, including deans and chairs. Our affiliated faculty help us enrich our research and programmatic initiatives and expand the diverse catalogue of undergraduate and graduate classes on Latin American issues. The newest affiliated faculty are: **Rajeev Patel**, research professor, LBJ School of Public Affairs; **Erin Rodriguez**, assistant professor, Department of Educational Psychology; **Roxanne Schroeder-Arce**, assistant professor, Department of Theatre and Dance; **Juan J. Colomina-Alimaña**, assistant professor of sociolinguistics through the Center for Mexican American Studies; **Tim Beach**, professor, Department of Geography and the Environment; and **Michael Rivera**, assistant professor, Departments of Government and Mexican American and Latina/o Studies. ✨

## UPCOMING LLILAS BENSON EVENTS

### FALL 2015

#### September

Exhibition of Brazilian *Cordel* Literature, Benson Latin American Collection

Student Photography Exhibition, Benson Latin American Collection

*Foro Urgente* on Venezuela

Coral Reefs at Risk in the Circum-Caribbean Region

#### October

Lozano Long Workshop: Race in Brazil

Gabriel García Márquez: His Life and Legacy, 12th biennial Flair Symposium with the Harry Ransom Center

#### November

Colloquium: Brazil 1995–2015: Twenty Years of Change

### SPRING 2016

#### February

ILASSA36 Student Conference on Latin America

2016 Lozano Long Conference: Migrant Detention, Forced Migration, and Neoliberalism in the Americas

#### April

Fourteenth Annual iA Viva Voz! Celebration of Latina/o Arts and Culture

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The University of Texas at Austin



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