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2022–2023



Anticolonialism: Segato & Moreno
Black Caribbean Identities with García Peña
Student Grants & Research

BERKELEY REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

2022–2023

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Cover: Dancers during Carnaval in Ayacucho, Peru, February 2023.
(Photo by Emily Fjaellen Thompson.)

Comment



Photo by Jim Block.

For thirty years, 2334 Bowditch Street has been the home of the Center.

Since its founding in 1956, the Center for Latin American Studies has been Berkeley's home for public events, fascinating visitors, and groundbreaking research on and in the region. For 67 years, CLAS has served as a bridge between the Bay Area and Latin America.

In that time, there have always been questions about the boundaries of the Center's work. Are migrant communities from the region in the United States part of its purview? What about relations between Latin America and other areas of the world? Most fundamentally, which countries constitute Latin America? Do they include territories subjected to colonization by England, the Netherlands, and France as well as Spain and Portugal?

In the past year, CLAS Chair Natalia Brizuela has undertaken a number of initiatives at the Center, reorienting its work to emphasize the diversity of the region. CLAS has centered decolonizing research in its program and supported new courses in Indigenous languages and cultures.

To start the 2023–2024 academic year, the Center is making another fundamental change, this time to reflect the lands it covers. In the past, the Caribbean has been treated as a liminal geography in studies of Latin America. That changes for CLAS and its community going forward.

This fall, the Center for Latin American Studies will become the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS). With this change in name, the Center commits to providing intellectual space to analyze cultures, histories, politics, and languages of the entire region.

CLAS anticipated this growth last spring, with a talk by Lorgia García Peña as part of our *New Vocabularies, New Grammars: Imagining Other Worlds* series, covered in this issue of the Review by franchises aráujo (p. 7).

The CLAS team is looking forward to an enhanced focus on the Caribbean in future events.

— CLAS Staff

Berkeley Center for Latin American
and Caribbean Studies

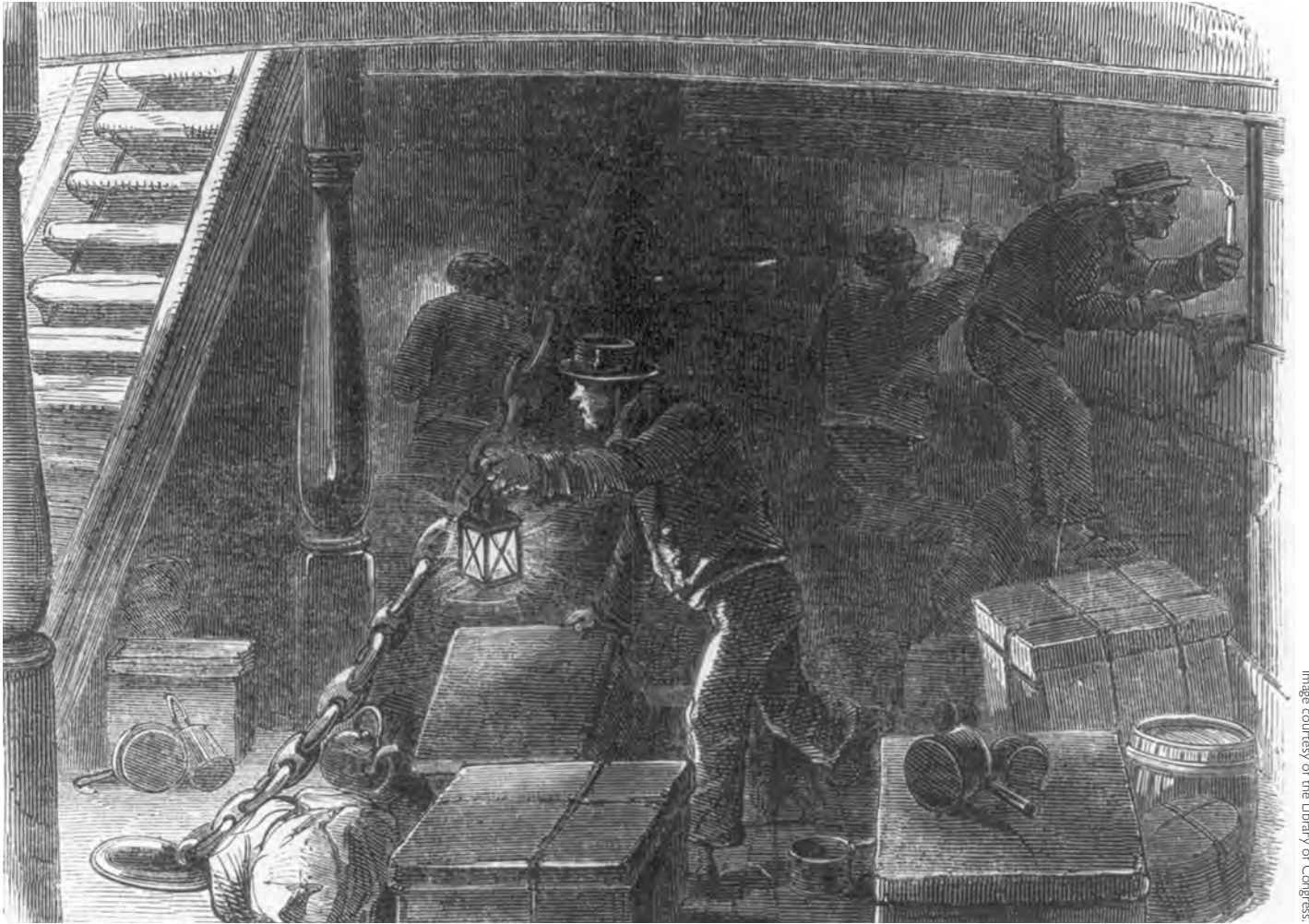


Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

ANTICOLONIALISM

British sailors hunt for stowaways in a merchant ship's hold in this 19th-century etching.

Stowaways: On Translating Rita Segato

By Ramsey McGlazer

I first came to know the Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato when I had the good fortune to translate a text of hers called “A Manifesto in Four Themes,” written for and published in the inaugural issue of the journal *Critical Times*. The manifesto is short but capacious; in the grand tradition of manifestos, it’s ambitious both intellectually and politically. As the author herself notes, the text condenses two decades’ worth of research. For this reason, it offers an excellent introduction to several key concepts in Segato’s work. Given that these concepts have both responded to and been met with responses from ongoing political struggles and social movements, I felt that I had a responsibility to try to do justice to the concepts as I translated the “Manifesto” into English.

But one thing that any translator learns, I think, is that language is not a transparent medium for the

communication of concepts. It’s not solely and strictly conceptual because it’s also sensuous or sinuous or intertextually allusive or irreverent or performative or playful—or all of these things at once. These are some of the features of a text’s language that we often think of as “lost,” “betrayed,” or at least badly damaged in translation. I found that they also happened to be hallmarks of Segato’s prose, signature elements of her style, which I came to see already in the “Manifesto”—and then even more so in *The Critique of Coloniality*—as inseparable from the substance of her claims.

These claims derive much of their power from what, in “A Manifesto in Four Themes,” Segato calls their “rhetoric” (p. 210). We can also think of this as a matter of musicality or theatricality, as in the original titles of the two texts by Segato that I have translated. Like “Manifesto en cuatro

temas,” *La crítica de la colonialidad en ocho ensayos* names a whole comprised of parts, where to my ear the analogs are, say, *The Symphony in Three Movements* or *A Play in Two Acts*. This emphasis on rhetoric, or on the musicality or the theatricality of language, puts pressure on the work of translation, which really is at risk of diluting or distorting the original, since no rhetoric can be carried over from one language to another and remain intact, leaving no remainder. But this also makes the work of translation more interesting, since it forces the translator to be more resourceful, attentive, and inventive.

Now, there are of course better and worse ways—more and less ethical ways—to be inventive as a translator. As I noted earlier, given the political import of Segato’s work, I felt a deep sense of responsibility. But I came to realize that I still had to take some risks or liberties or both. It wouldn’t make sense, translating prose as daring as Segato’s, to be safe, timid, overly cautious, to try to be altogether inconspicuous.

But this realization led me to another set of problems, and in order to bring these into relief, I’d like to turn to a moment in Segato’s “Manifesto” that also stands as an example of all I’ve been saying about her writing and the importance of her rhetoric in particular. “Reconstituting community,” Segato writes, “means being enlisted in a historical project that diverges from the historical project of capital” (p. 208). So far, smooth sailing: the sentence is lucid, the claim a conceptual one that clearly advances

an argument the author is making about the meaning of “historical projects” of various kinds. So, too, does the next sentence clearly specify that “religion... plays an important role” in the process that she is describing (p. 208). But, all of a sudden, something else starts happening when Segato swerves away from conceptual claims, turning to an anecdote that embeds these claims in a set of circumstances.

Here Segato says she came to realize that religion might represent a possible alternative to “the historical project of capital” in 1991. She was “teaching on a ship called the *SS Universe*,” which brought together “North American university students from rich families, many of them destined” to later play important roles in public life. College students on a cruise, doing a “semester at sea” (p. 208): The setup is already compelling. It’s as though the manifesto had suddenly become a play, with these its stage directions, or a novel by Henry James or Virginia Woolf. Think of the parties in *The Wings of the Dove* or of *The Voyage Out*. Characters are gathered in a confined space—sometimes a house, hotel, or palazzo, sometimes a ship—where social conflicts are bound to come to the surface.

But the plot of the “Manifesto” thickens: “due to the dangers presented by the Gulf War,” the ship is forced “to change course,” its rerouting a reminder of the ripple effects caused by the wars waged by the empire that these students are preparing to inherit. Enter Rita Segato, who is “hired to teach... young people... about Afro-Brazilian

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Ramsey McGlazer (left), Rita Segato (right), and Monica Gittleman in a CLAS webinar discussing McGlazer’s new translation.



religions” (p. 208). And so the social conflicts staged on this ship, detoured because of a faraway war, aren’t the interpersonal dynamics that we’d find in James or Woolf, after all. Segato boards the ship that you’ll remember is called the SS *Universe*; the detail is so perfect that if it weren’t true, it would have had to be invented. Then this exchange takes place:

During one of my classes, an older man in attendance asked to speak. I called on him, and, turning his back to me, he claimed for himself the authority of the teacher. Addressing the students, he said: “It’s because of these religions that I say that these countries will not be able to progress, because these religions are *dysfunctional for development*.” I was deeply disturbed when I heard him say this [*Inmensa fue mi conmoción al escucharlo*]. But what an invaluable lesson I learned from him—although, of course, I immediately took from what he said the opposite of what the respectable old man had intended: In the spiritual and communal life of *candomblé* were the seeds of resistance to the historical project of capitalism! I left the class wondering who this enigmatic person could be, this man who so zealously cared about the students’ education [*que tanto había celado por la buena formación de los alumnos*]. I found out that he was a politician who had been elected governor of Colorado three times, and who served

as director of the Institute for Public Policy Studies at the University of Denver: left up North, right down South. Ever since hearing his comment in that day’s class, I have understood that certain cosmologies and spiritualities, far from being “the opium of the people,” are *dysfunctional for capital*. (“Manifesto,” p. 208; “Manifesto,” p. 222)

I have quoted this passage at length so that readers can begin to hear my approximations in English of Segato’s wit and of the tone and rhythm of her sentences, because, as often happens, there is a lot going on tonally and rhythmically as well as conceptually in this moment. “But what an invaluable lesson I learned from him” is, for instance, both an earnest statement about the revelation that the man’s obnoxious in-class intervention turned out to be and a joke at his expense, since the lesson teaches “the opposite of what the respectable old man had intended.” That the “respectable señor” is, in fact, unworthy of our respect is just one thing we are meant to hear in an irony that exceeds claims-making, even while it carries on the manifesto’s effort to locate and articulate the value of alternatives to “the historical project of capitalism.”

At this point, readers may be wondering why I have chosen to dwell on this detour, captivating though it undeniably is. What does this white guy, this prototypical Ugly American, this *yanqui*, this *gringo* have to do with

Students aboard the SS *Universe* as part of the Semester at Sea program.



Photo courtesy of the Semester at Sea Program.

The Critique of Coloniality? I have dwelt on this man because the memory of him came to haunt me as I was translating Segato's book. My work on the longer text entailed spending much more time with Segato's prose, but it also meant confronting the risk that I'd stand between the author and her audience, that I'd interrupt and turn my back on her discourse somehow, and that I'd do so without teaching a compensatory, if unwitting, "lesson" or allowing for any revelation of my own.

To be totally honest, in my heart of hearts I feel that I share very little with this mansplaining, moralizing policy person. I am quite a bit younger and am neither a politician nor the director of an institute. I began to translate books because I was adjuncting and needed the money—a fact that I share not to be maudlin, but rather because I take the disclosure to be in keeping with the spirit of Segato's own gestures of self-positioning. I needed the money in a way the distinguished man didn't, and in any case, I would never presume to deliver proclamations about people's ability "to progress." I really do not think I am much like this guy at all, and yet, structurally I share more with him than I would like: I, too, am a white guy from the United States, which is to say from a country that understands itself to be the universe. I was trained and still work in a place whose "scholars," as Segato writes in *The Critique of Coloniality*, "are seen as producers or disseminators of theoretical models to be adopted in the South, as the builders and masters of most knowledge about the world" (p. 209).

The more I translated *The Critique of Coloniality*, the more I thought of the passage in Segato's "Manifesto" as a warning. Even if I could never completely rid myself of the governor within, eliminating all traces of his presence in my psyche, I could at least watch out for and try to work against his interruptions. I could try to get out of the way of Segato's text even while I sought to make it available to audiences in the Anglophone North. I could try to avoid, as much as possible, the lexicon of development, the syntax proper to capitalism's historical project. To this end, I went in search of other figures. If the man from Colorado was the devil who stood on one shoulder while I translated, was there an *angelito* who could offer countervailing advice, who could model another approach and engage in another form of listening?

I found this other figure in *The Critique of Coloniality*, and it is to this figure that I will devote the rest of this essay. Twice in the book's introduction, Segato refers to someone whom I chose to name the "stowaway" (pp. 8, 17). Both times, what's at issue is an ancestry or inheritance that is doubly hidden and thus twice denied in hegemonic accounts of racialization in Latin America: a "sangre... viajera oculta" (literally, an unseen, traveling... blood) that secretly gathers

together those "que escondidos navegan por las mayorías blanqueadas, travestidas de 'Europa'" (literally, those who, hidden, sail through the whitened majorities, dressed in "European" drag) (*La crítica*, pp. 31, 20).

Explaining her effort to reassess the meaning of *mestizaje* in the sixth chapter of her book, "The Deep Rivers of the Latin American Race," Segato invites us "to retrace the paths of stowaways, the bloodlines of travelers hidden within the whitened veins of the creole, the major exponent... of the racist, misogynist, and homophobic gaze on the world" (*Critique*, p. 17). Translating this sentence, I experimented with different idioms and tried out several figurative and syntactical solutions. Segato's original deliberately mixes metaphors; she refers to an effort to "desandar el camino de la sangre" (*La crítica*, p. 31). Blood is liquid, but a *camino* cuts through land. Should the phrase *desandar el camino*, then, be "retrace the steps" or "reverse course"? Were the covert travelers walking or swimming, and where were they now? I settled on a compromise, dividing the single Spanish phrase into two in my English translation, and naming the voyagers twice, first as stowaways, then as hidden travelers, so that the sentence began: "Here it is the racial sign within *mestizaje* that allows us to retrace the paths of stowaways, the bloodlines of travelers within the whitened veins of the creole" (*Critique*, p. 17).

Still, the Spanish lets us hear more clearly than the English that the stowaways are still stowed away, that they didn't just steal onto ships in a remote past but remain furtive and fugitive to this day. Within the veins, the very body, of the creole, the *criollo*, the white settler, are the remnants of the travelers from whom he descends, and these aren't just any travelers. They are stowaways, and this means they are people who were compelled to hide, to travel without a ticket or a visa or a work permit or a job aboard the ship or any other authorization to be there. "Stowaway" is my translation of the word *polizón*, which the Real Academia Española's *Diccionario* notes is from a French word meaning "vagabond" or "thief" and defines as a "person who boards a ship in a clandestine fashion" or an "idle and aimless person, who moves from one group to another [*persona ociosa y sin destino que anda de corrillo en corrillo*]" (*Diccionario*, n.p.). Obviously, I am focused on the first of these definitions, but I like the second definition's reminder that *polizón* carries old associations with vagrancy and social promiscuity as well as with a kind of informal collectivity. These associations are regrettably missing from the more static and more solo figure that is the English "stowaway."

To be clear, I travel with a U.S. passport that prevents me from having to move through the world in a clandestine fashion. I had a contract to complete the translation that

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became *The Critique of Coloniality*, and so I was not in any real sense an unauthorized traveler on Segato's ship, which I came to think of as a vessel smuggling anticolonial thought into the colonial fortress of the Anglophone academy. I was not in fact a stowaway, but the stowaway became an aspirational figure for me, one who stood opposed to the governor whose arrogance and interference I sought to avoid. I tried to travel with and within the text rather than to commandeer it, to learn its language (though working at a remove from its context) rather than making its language one with mine.

I cannot say whether I succeeded or even made it halfway. I can only note that this was what allowed me to make peace with the fact that I was separated from Segato by a gulf or by several: linguistic, cultural, gendered, and colonial. Rather than jump ship, I sought to become a stowaway, to make common cause with stowaways. Or at the very least, I hoped to become stowaway-like, mindful of the fact Segato uses *polizón* adjectivally and not as a noun, catachrestically rather than in the service of substantivization or personification. This was how I responded to the recognition of the gulfs that separated me from the author and how I sought to correct for the presence of the governor within.

This governor, who thinks he's entitled to discount whole forms of life as he loudly deems them "dysfunctional for development," is like the Eurodescendant creole whom Segato calls the bearer "of the racist, misogynist, and homophobic gaze on the world" ("Manifesto," p. 208; *Critique*, p. 17). He denies what Segato asks us to see: that we can "return, reattach ourselves to, recover ties to the historical projects of the peoples enclosed by coloniality and by the compulsory amnesia imposed on populations as a form of genocide" (*Critique*, p. 8). For me, so much of what Segato does in her remarkable book is distilled in these phrases, which mark the place of a different form of enclosure: not the stowaway's concealment within a ship's hold, but the confinement of whole historical projects through a differential distribution of carceral captivity.

To "recover ties" to the historical projects that preceded and opposed this process is not to deny the ongoing history of enclosures, of incarceration. Segato suggests instead that it can be a way of beginning the long process of bringing a different history into being. The suggestion recalls one of the boldest and most astonishing claims made in "A Manifesto in Four Themes": that in fact we have not yet entered history because we still live in "the stationary time of the *patriarchal prehistory of humanity*" (p. 199, emphasis in original).

Throughout *The Critique of Coloniality*, Segato insists that another, nonstationary history, a real history, remains

available, if not always visible because it is often hidden. Calling for a return to and a reconstitution of other historical projects, she invites us to see what continues to be clandestine under conditions of "compulsory amnesia," but she also reminds us that we can take part in an enormous collective effort to remember. It was an honor to receive the invitation, to translate the reminder, and to do what I could to join the effort.

Author's note: This essay began as a talk presented at a virtual book launch for The Critique of Coloniality: Eight Essays, organized by the Center for Latin American Studies at UC Berkeley and held on September 28, 2022. I thank the organizers of that event: Natalia Brizuela, Julia Byrd, and Janet Waggaman. I also want to thank the fellow travelers who helped in various ways as I was translating the book: Paco Brito Núñez, Ashley Brock, Karen Cresci, Pedro Hurtado Ortiz, and Pedro Monque. Thanks to Marlena Gittleman for participating in the event and especially to Rita Segato for the gift of her writing and thinking.

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References for this article are online at clas.berkeley.edu.

The cover of McGlazer's translation.

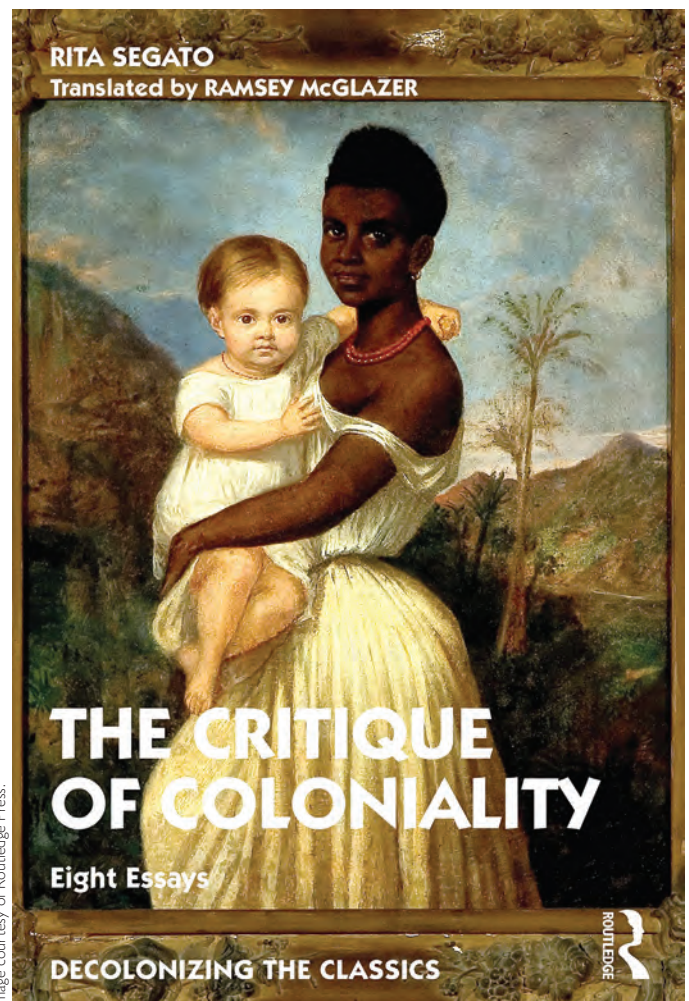




Image from the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center.

THE CARIBBEAN

A 1758 map of “The island of Hispaniola, called by the French St. Domingo.”

Notes on Black latinidades, Antillean Political Thought, and Empire

By franchisesca araujo

In our recent conversation about her book *Translating Blackness: Latinx Colonialities in Global Perspective* (Duke University Press, 2022), Lorgia García Peña said, “Archival documents are as important as hearsay in my work. They have the same value.” This statement was as hilarious as it was profound. From her first book, *The Borders of Dominicanidad*, to her latest project, García Peña’s work demonstrates a deep methodological attentiveness to Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s call for us to not just consider what history is, but how history is produced and how it works. Such a declaration about the officialized archive grapples with the understanding that the way Black life shows up in the archive is often through violence, rendered through colonial subjugation, while it reveals the compounded erasures at work in Caribbean contexts. In the case of Afro-Caribbean subjects in a nation often elided

by all of the fields and disciplines its existence touches, the voices and lives we want to reach frequently fall out of the “documentation regime,” as historian Anne Eller puts it.¹

García Peña’s approach in her first chapter, “A Full Stature of Humanity: Latinx Difference, Colonial Musings, and Black Belonging during Reconstruction”—her engagement with the archive—is a process and tool through which she can approach a more intimate proximity to the life of the Black Caribbean latina whose personal subjectivity and theorizing provide us with a larger critical purchase regarding Blacknesses and their encounters, translation, and historical contingency. In this chapter’s postscript, titled “Unsilencing the Past,” García Peña reiterates Trouillot’s description of how one *silences*

1. Anne Eller (2016), *We Dream Together: Dominican Independence, Haiti, and the Fight for Caribbean Freedom*, Duke University Press.

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Lorgia García Peña (left) at her UC Berkeley talk in 2023, with francesca araujo.

in the production of history. That is, silencing is intentional in the creation of the archive as a site of exclusion. In this last section, she describes the challenge of “abundance rather than lack” while studying imperialist ventures of the United States in the Dominican Republic and Haiti: “The documentation of U.S. Americans’ thoughts about Dominicans fills a room; but so does the silences this excess reproduces” (p. 74).

Among that excess of silencing are the sentiments of average Dominicans. Imagining what the moment of potential U.S. annexation must have been like for her father’s great-grandmother María Frías, a farmer, García Peña writes:

She must have been so overwhelmed by the uncertainty of a future in which men continued to decide if blood was to be shed, if we were to call ourselves Dominicans, Spaniards, Haitians, or Americans, if we continued to speak Spanish or if we would need to learn English or French. Or perhaps none of these questions were relevant when food was scarce and caudillos would not allow her to work her plot of land. Did María Frías care at all who governed the country or what flag was installed in a government building she would never visit? (p. 78)

García Peña’s thoughtful moves related to archival silencing and the ways colonized subjects contradict the officialized archive was the point of departure from which I sought to discuss her analytical furthering of hegemonic Blackness (and the centrality of Reconstruction/post-Civil War articulations of Blackness in the United States through expansionist measures) and her theorizing of Black *latinidad* as an analytic in the aforementioned first chapter of *Translating Blackness*.

As a Black Studies scholar indebted to Caribbeanist theory, I understand Black Studies not merely as an investigation of identities or a multicultural medium through which we can facilitate a project of murderous inclusion into the nation-state as it stands, but as a critique of Western civilization. For that reason, I appreciate how *Translating Blackness* offers Black *latinidad* as an epistemology, a place from which to think and ask a different set of questions. By offering Black *latinidad* (and in this particular project, as I will touch on later, a Black *latinidad* that is firmly rooted and centered in the Antilles) as a place from which to think, García Peña helps us consider how *even among* the human “others” who suffer under the governing codes in which man is overrepresented²—that is, even

2. Sylvia Wynter (2003), “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3:3, 257-337.

within the oppositional politics and discourse that develop in response to that overrepresentation—there come to be assumed universals and perpetual footnotes. There is an assumed universal Black subject even within the critiques of default universalized enlightenment subjecthood. Hegemonic Blackness, which García Peña describes as Blackness “defined through U.S. culture, politics, histories, and the Anglophone experience,” touches on that sensitive predicament (p. 4). Although the “construction of Blackness is always situational” and historically contextual, “hegemonic globalized versions of ethno-racial concepts dominate popular perceptions, intellectual discourse, social and popular media, and at times, even legislation, shaping people’s actions and encounters with race and coloniality” (p. 6).

Tracing a particular consolidation of the emergence of hegemonic Blackness, García Peña focuses on Gregoria Fraser, a Black Caribbean latina musician and writer from the late 1800s, an era when the demands of legibility made the decision to insist on the centrality of her island geography to her Black identity a difficult one, yet still she decided to do so. García Peña explores the relationship between Fraser’s two *patrias* (the Dominican Republic and the United States between 1867 and 1880, when both countries were recovering from civil wars) and her two godfathers, U.S. abolitionist and statesman Frederick Douglass and Gregorio Luperón, the Dominican general who led the war against Spain (1863–65) ending in the country’s independence. García Peña uses these two male figures to get closer to Fraser’s “vaivenes” and “contradictions,” while analyzing the relationship between the project of U.S. imperial expansion throughout the Caribbean and the project of U.S. Black citizenship during the two decades that followed the U.S. Civil War as central to Black latinidad.

Although a rough translation of *vaivenes* would be “comings and goings,” to better understand the precise work it does in this chapter, it is more useful to think about how the term stands in relation to the other categories of analysis and engagement present in the book. García Peña proposes “Black Latinidad as a category from which we can better understand the vaivenes of colonialism and migration that shape Black experiences in diaspora”

(p. 5). So we might understand Fraser’s vaivenes as the spatial and temporal contingencies of the moving, staying, and pausing in her life that were at once contoured and predetermined by colonial violence, racialization, and class access, while remaining an arena for Fraser’s agency and self-definition.

Carefully tracing how imperial expansionist ideology coalesced with the problem of Black citizenship in the United States in the post-bellum era (that is, the inability to imagine Blackness as incorporable into citizenship, at least while still visibly present in the mainland), García Peña convincingly asserts that:

...it is precisely during Reconstruction and U.S. expansion, as U.S. Black subjects grappled with the contradictions of citizenship and empire, that we find the roots of a hegemonic narrative of Blackness—shaped by the U.S. empire—that continues to dominate transnational conversations, political processes, and intellectual and cultural discourses across the globe. (p. 35)

One of the imagined solutions to the “question of Blackness” was the possibility of annexing Black nations in the Caribbean and shipping freed Black people to these locations.

The Dominican Republic emerged as a promising site for this endeavor from 1867 until the middle of the 1870s. Focusing on the debate surrounding Dominican annexation through U.S. Senator Charles Sumner and Frederick Douglass (the former became an important ally for anti-annexation leaders and the latter was appointed to the Commission of Inquiry for annexation in 1871), García Peña demonstrates that:

...it is during Reconstruction—a period of mass U.S. expansion over the Americas—that the notion of a ‘Latin difference’ is articulated and expanded to include U.S. Blackness as different from other forms of Blackness. As U.S. Blacks were invited into the nation through the passage of the 14th Amendment, they were also invited into U.S. imperialism. (p. 36)

In this uncertain historical moment, Luperón and Douglass both articulate and construct a version



Lorgia García Peña thanks CLAS for her welcome. (From García Peña’s Twitter feed.)

of Black latinx difference. While “Douglass cited U.S. ‘civility’ and Dominican ‘barbarism’: the very language of colonial dominance that was used to enslave Black people for nearly three centuries” as justification for U.S. annexation and its attendant benefits, Luperón articulated a Black latinx difference as a way to mobilize desires for anti-colonial freedom and sovereignty against the threat of U.S. expansion in 1871 (ibid.). Through Luperón, we can recognize that this moment of Dominican anti-colonial insistence on Caribbean sovereignty marks latinidad as rooted in and emergent through Blackness and “Black citizenship in Hispaniola, in contradistinction to U.S. hegemony and expansionism” (p. 38). Luperón’s response to his contemporary moment and the conditions that birthed it leads García Peña to theorize “latinidad as a site of anti-colonial, racially inclusive citizenship that begins with the possibility of Black belonging” (ibid.).

Before I turn to the tensions between this Afro-Antillean-rooted political project of latinidad and the ways latinidad dominantly operates now, I want to pause on the precision with which García Peña narrates encounters between different geographic emergences of Blackness. During her March 2023 presentation at UC Berkeley, she declared:

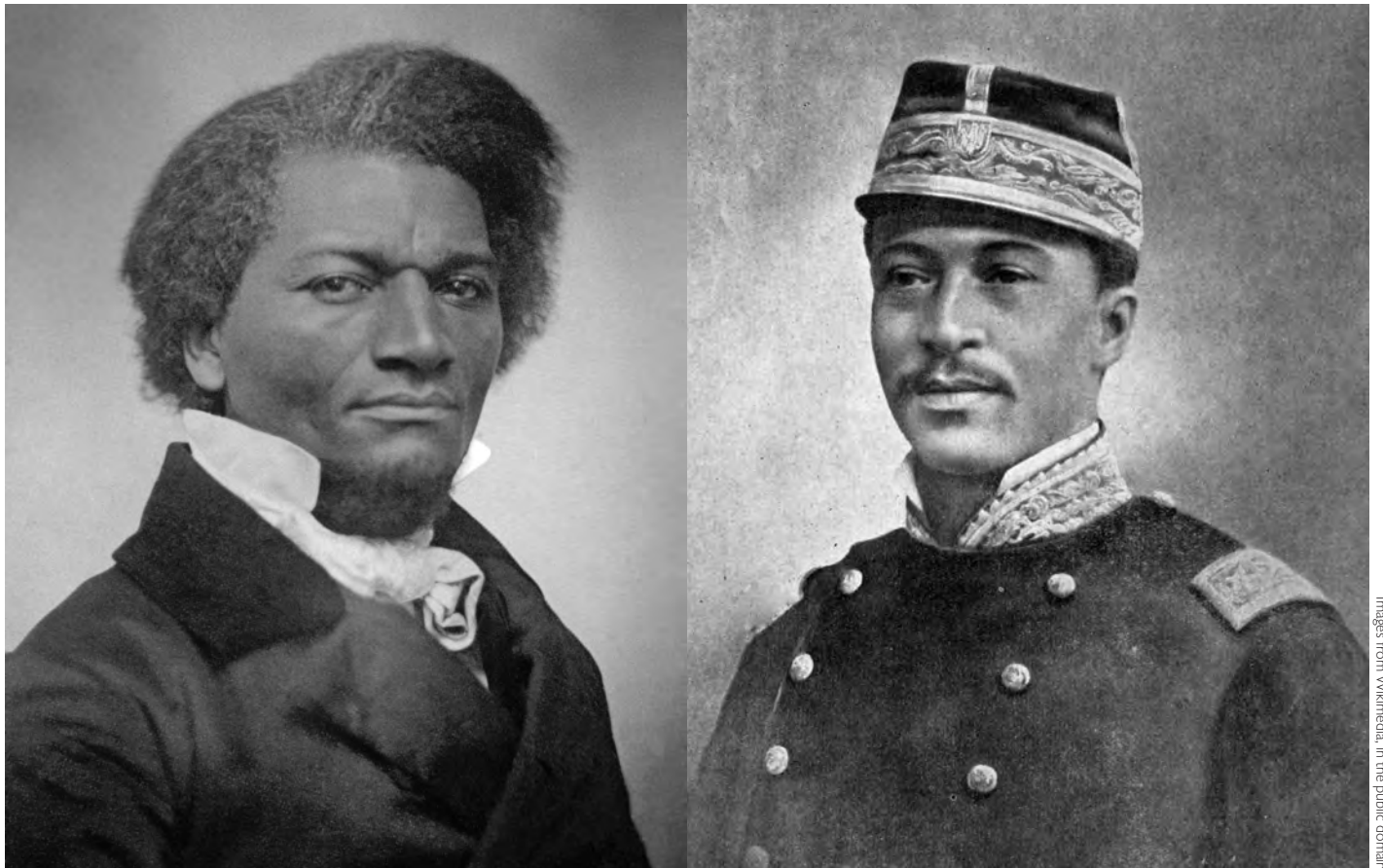
“We can find the roots of the complicated *vaivén* of Dominican Blackness as a theory that is very much intertwined with the economic and political ambitions of expansionist post-Civil War United States, a process that has continued to grow and shape the internal and external constructions of Dominican Blackness.”

This assertion recalls Raj Chetty’s thoughtful highlighting of the transnational Black encounter exemplified by Antonio Thomem’s letter, titled “Listen: American Negro Soldier,” which was written in 1965 during the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic.³ Chetty identifies that “while expressing racial solidarity with Black soldiers, the letter also exposes the central contradiction of Black U.S. soldiers facing racial struggles at home while acting as agents of U.S. imperialism.”⁴

Just as Chetty brings this instance to the center of our thinking and rejects its removal from the historical moments that have produced our current terrain, García Peña questions our current cyclical and self-affirming narratives, not just about Dominican pathology, but about U.S. authority over correct or ethical forms of

3. Raj Chetty and Amaury Rodriguez (2015, Summer), “The Challenge and Promise of Dominican Black Studies,” *The Black Scholar* 45:2, SPECIAL ISSUE: Dominican Black Studies, 1-9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2015.1012990>.
4. Ibid.

The godfathers of Gregoria Fraser, Frederick Douglass (left) and Gregorio Luperón.



Images from Wikimedia, in the public domain.

Blackness and their dependence on a particular kind of historical narrativization. One that, for example, elides the fact that it was precisely in post-Reconstruction U.S. discourses that the Dominican Republic was fantastically imagined as “a racial paradise—a perfect mix of white, Black, and Brown people, in contradistinction with ‘Black Haiti,’” which, combined with its environmental wealth and geographic location, made it “attractive to investors, politicians, and *Black freedom advocates alike*” (p. 41, emphasis added). Chetty and García Peña both offer a Dominican Black Studies against the grain that centers translation as evoked by Brent Hayes Edwards⁵ and, for García Peña’s part, divests from the idea of the nation as the primary vehicle through which we should imagine our relationships.

Shifting the perpetual footnote from the periphery to the center allows for more rigorous understandings of Blackness that go beyond crass identity politics and into geographies (temporal and spatial) of specific constructions and uses of Blackness. It also disrupts the dominant *mestizo*-oriented, anti-Black, anti-Indigenous *latinidad* in both daily life and canonized academic texts.⁶ On this note, I would like to turn to the centrality of Caribbeanism to Luperón’s articulation and strategic use of *latinidad*. Luperón’s vision of citizenship rested on an insistence on multiracial egalitarianism for which Black citizenship was integral and that was fundamentally incompatible with slavery—a discursive and political mobilization similar to the one Ada Ferrer traces in *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation and Revolution, 1868-1898* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), which narrates the end of slavery and the emerging anti-colonial and anti-racist discourses in Cuba’s nation building.

In both Ferrer and García Peña’s historical offerings, we must mourn the contingent possibilities those projects represented. One of the earliest proponents of the Confederación Antillana,⁷ Luperón’s political voice and imagined political horizon remind us that historically contingent projects of *dominicanidad* cannot be reduced to the era of Trujillo or to Hispanophile directions and desires, even among political leaders and generals. In Luperón’s political vision, the country’s values were established by “negotiating and imagining it as part of three territories and political projects: the island of

Hispaniola, the Antilles, and *latinidad*. These negotiations were grounded on an understanding of *mulataje*—Black and white racial mixing (as opposed to Hispanicized *mestizaje*)—that did not privilege whiteness but centered Blackness” (p. 38).

Thus, *latinidad* “emerged as a political and intellectual project in Hispaniola during the intense period of expansionism that followed the end of the U.S. Civil War (1865-98)...the idea of *latinidad* was intrinsically shaped by a preoccupation with multiracial citizenship in the face of U.S. imperial expansion, in *contradiction* to the violence of slavery and the ever-present specter of European coloniality embodied in white criollos and caudillos” (p. 38, emphasis in original). This kind of political orientation anticipates Dominican intellectual, writer, and short-lived president Juan Bosch’s later understanding of the Caribbean as the imperial frontier and the centrality of Caribbean geographic particularity in understanding the Dominican Republic. I see this attentiveness as an opening for us to consider how we might put these 19th- and 20th-century articulations of Caribbeanism in conversation with francophone and anglophone Caribbeanist theory.

Clearly García Peña’s work is engaging in an act of recovery and a rejection of a singularized origin of *latinidad* most compatible with its contemporary dominant operation that facilitates Black erasure and death.⁸ Given the ways in which *latinidad* has come to develop dominantly in the United States and other sites, I am unsure about the political possibilities of reclaiming this Hispaniola and Luperón origin story to intervene in and change the trajectory and terms with which we articulate ourselves and our futures through *latinidad*. But I do see the reminder of the layered positioning of the Dominican Republic as central to Blackness, Caribbeanism, and *latinidad* as a critical point of departure from which we can expand and reconsider our accepted problem-spaces⁹ and governing terms, in all of their convergences and disjunctures. If Black *latinidad* is an analytic and an epistemology, what would it mean for those at the U.S. locus and most legible through the terms of hegemonic Blackness to pause and think from that space?

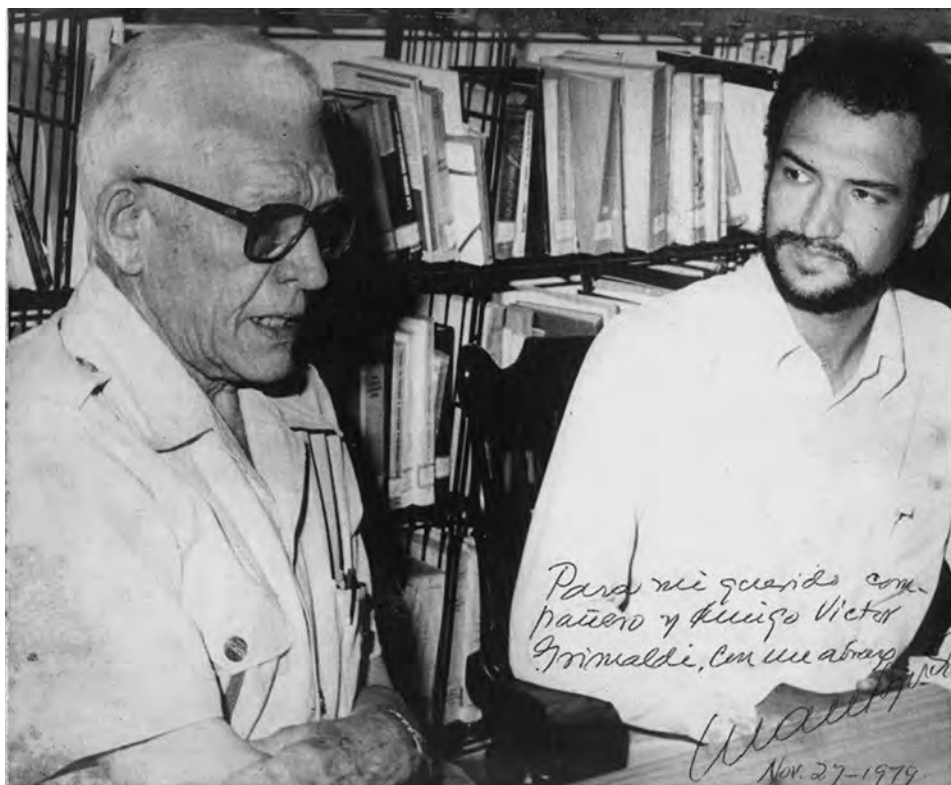
8. See cultural critic Zahirah Kelly Cabrera’s conversation in the “Bag Ladiez” podcast. <https://www.boomplay.com/episode/1623860>.

9. David Scott’s concept of a “problem-space,” after an engagement with R.G. Collingwood and Quentin Skinner, revisits a “logic of question and answer.” In *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton University Press, 1999), Scott argues that texts are responses to a contingent demand posed by (and within) a particular historical moment. These historical “conjunctures” are “problem-spaces” or “conceptual-ideological ensembles, discursive formations, or language games that are *generative of objects, and therefore of questions*.” Therefore, in order to assess how our questions and answers are actually relevant or not relevant to our current political moment, we need to “reconstruct the questions that organize and give point to the problem-spaces in which they are generated” (Scott, p. 6, emphasis added).

5. Brent Hayes Edwards (2001), *The Uses of Diaspora*. *Social Text* 19:1, 45-73.

6. Tatiana Flores (2021), “Latinidad Is Canceled: Confronting an Anti-Black Construct.” *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 3:3, 58-79.

7. The Confederación was “a project that sought the political unification of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic against U.S. imperialism and Spanish colonization under the ideals of freedom, justice, and racial equality...articulated and redefined in a historical circularity that parallels the struggles for freedom in the Caribbean, including Haitian independence (1804), Dominican Restoration (1865), Grito de Lares in Puerto Rico (1868), and Grito de Yara in Cuba (1869)” (*Translating Blackness*, pp. 60-61).



Juan Bosch (left) and Dominican journalist and political figure Víctor Manuel Grimaldi Céspedes.

What I find so deeply crucial and profound about García Peña's identification of this articulation of *latinidad* as grounded in the geography of the Dominican Republic and in Caribbeaness—and oftentimes centering Blackness—is the cross-temporal reiterations of this insistence. It is precisely that layered positioning that makes the continued glimmer of Antillean insistence in Dominican articulations so interesting to me, particularly in the following case: through dembow.¹⁰ Indebted to Deborah Thomas's and Dixia Ramirez's framings of popular culture, I consider—while resisting a binary analysis that searches for liberatory or counter-revolutionary signal posts as the only possible metrics through which we can understand them—how popular culture and barrio/hood aesthetics emerge as an articulation of Dominicaness distinct from that which is sanctioned by the state and its officialized narrative.¹¹

For example, in the recently released remix to “Yo Soy Mamá,” by Dominican dembow artist La Insuperable, the Dominican *dembowsera* Yailin La Más Viral declares that “todas quieren ser dominicana” (every woman wants to be Dominican), after which she reminds listeners to regard her

as a “*negra del cocoleo*.”¹² *Cocoleo* derives from the word *cocolo*, a Hispanic Caribbean term levied at Afro-Caribbean migrants from the end of the 19th century onwards. In the Dominican Republic, it has been used to describe dark-skinned people, whether Dominican or Haitian, Dominicans of Haitian descent/ethnic Haitians, or Haitian migrants. In its past daily articulations, the term was frequently an anti-Black insult. More recently, it has been appropriated in urban music scenes from rap to dembow.¹³

Yailin isn't the first Dominican artist to claim this word in a cheeky, self-celebratory way.¹⁴ But the context in which she does so, and the particular subject position from which she's acting—as a

light-skinned Black woman who is a loud defender of dembow as a nationally rejected genre emerging from neglected youth in barrios deemed incompatible with the national project—makes it especially interesting. I see this utterance as a telling instance of Afro-Antillean dissonant diction. That is, an instance of racialized literary articulation that negotiates, engages with, rejects, or turns around the relationship with the nation-state via ambivalence, negotiation, rejection, or rewriting of keywords central to state identity.

Turning the nation upside down is central to the Black geographic as well as to the call for historical specificities that García Peña rigorously exemplifies in her work. This dissonant articulation of an affirmation of place—and of Dominican Blackness within a broader, erasure-ridden *latinidad*—points to some ways that we might approach translating Blackness: by firmly rooting ourselves in the “when and where” of Blackness, in the politics of place, placing primacy on geographic space (not just cultural difference).¹⁵

10. Although describing the intricacies, evolutions, aesthetics, and innovations of dembow is nearly impossible to do in a brief sentence here it must suffice to describe it as Black music from the barrios/hoods of the Dominican Republic, with rhythmic roots in Jamaican dancehall riddims (its name, in fact, being shared with Shabba Ranks's 1990 song “Dem Bow”). As an art form and an archive, Dominican dembow challenges us toward an engagement with relation and the productive force of Black creation within colonial modernity, rather than purity and insular origins.

11. Lorgia García Peña (2016), *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction*, Duke University Press.

12. Yailin worked as a hair braider in urban barrios of Santo Domingo before releasing her own music.

13. See Petra Rivera-Rideau (2013), “Cocolos Modernos”: Salsa, Reggaetón, and Puerto Rico's Cultural Politics of Blackness, for a history of how *Cocolo* has been taken up in diasporic Puerto Rican contexts. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17442222.2013.768459>.

14. See Patogeno Musa's music video for his song “Cocoleo.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdEuuqUi6mE>.

15. Place signals us towards how assertions of decolonial practices, Black life, and Black futures are embedded in place, meaning that it allows us to “dislodge crude identity politics” and not fall victim to a sort of disavowal of nation that fails to account for the centrality of the soils, concrete, and shores that contour where people think from and what kinds of alternatives to domination they imagine; see Katherine McKittrick (2020), *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Duke University Press). I distinguish this from cultural

Ostensibly, Yailin’s response is to the racial vitriol she has received from non-Black South Americans—and non-Black latinos in general—regarding her relationships with two other music artists from Latin America, one a white Colombian woman.¹⁶ Yet, viewing this utterance as merely reactionary obfuscates the racial dynamics within latinidad as a category and as an imagined community, as well as the process through which nation-states as units are racialized and the ways in which that categorization relegates their citizen-subjects to specific positions within the global economy. For Black Dominican women, Yailin’s declaration “todas quieren ser dominicana” is a proclamation of arrogant celebration and an affirmation of the unacceptability of colonial anti-Black violence.

It is also an astute observation of the profitability of Dominican culture from the barrio, evinced by Bad Bunny, Rosalía, and many other artists’ uses of Dominican genres, dialects, and culture in globally renowned projects. Because of her context, Yailin’s declaration was a bigger risk and heftier truth than Bad Bunny’s line, “todos quieren ser latinos” (everybody wants to be latino), in one of the most popular songs in *Un Verano Sin Ti*, the biggest album of 2022.¹⁷

Arguably, based on the geographic emergence of the genres and forms used to relay the message, the technically correct refrain for “El Apagón” would have been “todos quieren ser caribeños” (everybody wants to be Caribbean), a proclamation that would destabilize hegemonic latinidad and the displacement of Caribbeanness and Blackness from the very aesthetics and cultural productions that emerged from both. A proclamation that would remind consumers and partakers that tiny island geographies are the source of the Afro-Caribbean creativity that becomes subsumed by the generalized category of latinx. In contrast, Yailin’s affirmation is distinctly *Black* Caribbean and particularly Dominican: “Caribeña la connect del fogueo.” Yailin’s articulation is a dissonant diction because it inverts the stigmatized and contained into what is centered and celebrated.

Nonetheless, I want to be clear that by using the language of inversion, I am not attaching myself to the

difference, which can end in individualized identity politics or insular nationalism (though, of course, not always). Place, or a space that has been storied with meaning, demands of us an attentiveness to exchanges and both materiality and the discursive.

16. Yailin’s connection to Puerto Rican rapper Anuel AA and by extension, Colombian singer Karol G, has led to vicious comments on her social media accounts and constant racially and nationally coded discourses about Yailin’s lack of class surrounding her work and appearance in radio shows and pop culture news mediums. That Karol G and Anuel AA are currently two of the most prominent “Latin music” artists in the world makes the aforementioned visibility and scrutiny especially intense.

17. Bad Bunny’s *Un Verano Sin Ti* wrapped 2022 as the most popular album of the year in the United States, according to music data tracking firm Luminate. *Un Verano Sin Ti* debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 chart dated May 21, 2022, and spent 13 nonconsecutive weeks atop the list, the most weeks at No. 1 for any album since Drake’s *Views* also logged 13 weeks at No. 1 in 2016.

See Keith Caulfield (2023). “Bad Bunny’s ‘Un Verano Sin Ti’ Is Luminate’s Top Album of 2022 in U.S.” *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/music/chart-beat/2022-us-year-end-music-report-luminate-top-album-bad-bunny-un-verano-sin-ti-1235196736/>.



Image captured from YouTube.

Yailin La Más Viral in the 2022 video for *Soy Mama*.

problem-space we have been forced to inherit, where we start and end at the question of a progressive teleology of purported Black self-affirmation or self-hatred. Through García Peña’s precise consideration of translation, converging colonial violence, and hegemonic Blackness, I would hope most people would arrive at an understanding that attempting to present the articulation of Black centrality or Caribbean connection as a new and novel development or an unimaginable contradiction to the usual Dominican pathology would be more of a discursive imperative and narrativized construction than a unique empirical truth applicable to no other geography. Clearly, the sense of Antillean geographic emplacement that led to Yailin’s declaration extends back to at least the 19th century.

Lorgia García Peña is the Mellon Associate Professor of Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora Studies at Tufts University. Her presentation on March 17, 2023, was jointly sponsored by CLAS and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UC Berkeley.

franchesca aráujo is a PhD student in Black Studies in UC Berkeley’s African American and African Diaspora Studies Department.

CLAS Events

New Vocabularies, New Grammars: Imagining Other Worlds

Undoing the divisions between disciplines and genres, between political action and intellectual engagement

Feb 17 | Voro'pi: Art and Education in Between Worlds

Naine Terena, Gustavo Caboco, and Jamille Pinheiro Dias (College of London) presented a scholarly and artistic encounter inspired by Voro'pi, the spirit of the waters for the Terena people of Brazil.

Feb 18 | Coma Colonial

Gustavo Caboco created an art installation at CLAS that asked, how can a Center for Latin American Studies contribute to decentering the very notion of Latin America?

Mar 6 | Unwalling Citizenship

Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman (UC San Diego) discussed community building among temporary habitations of migrants in Tijuana, Mexico.

Mar 16-17 | Translating Blackness: Latinx Colonialities in Global Perspective

Lorgia García Peña (Tufts University) examined the legacies of colonialism and slavery as they shape the lives of Black Latinx people in diaspora and discussed her book *Translating Blackness*.

Events in this series were co-sponsored by the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, the Arts Research Center, the Departments of History of Art and Spanish and Portuguese, and the Berkeley Center for New Media.

Novedades/Lançamentos: New Scholarship @ Berkeley

Highlighting new work on Latin America and the Caribbean from UC Berkeley scholars

Sep 15 | *Cooperating with the Colossus. A Social and Political History of US Military Bases in World War II Latin America*

Rebecca Herman (History) discussed the complex history of U.S. bases in Latin America, with Margaret Chowning and Kyle Jackson.

Sep 28 | *The Critique of Coloniality: Eight Essays*

Ramsey McGlazer (Comparative Literature) talked with author Rita Segato about his translation of her book *La crítica de la colonialidad en ocho ensayos*, joined by Marlena Gittleman.

Mar 7 | *To Defend This Sunrise: Black Women's Activism and the Authoritarian Turn in Nicaragua*

Courtney Desiree Morris (Gender & Women's Studies) looked at the Ortega government in Nicaragua and its use of multicultural language to dispossess, with Tianna Paschel, Jovan Scott Lewis, and Lok Siu.

Mar 23 | *The Spectacular Generic: Pharmaceuticals and the Simipolitical in Mexico*

Cori Hayden (Anthropology) examined the intersection of generic pharmaceuticals and the politics of Mexico, with Mara Loveman.

Apr 20 | *Racial Alterity, Wixárika Youth Activism, and the Right to the Mexican City*

Diana Negrín (Geography) focused on the racial imaginary around the Wixárika people of Mexico's Sierra Madre, with Pablo Gonzalez and Maria Pettis.

2022–2023 Series

CineLatino

Film screenings, director's talks, and academic engagement around Latin American and Caribbean cinema

Aug 26 | *Três Tigres Tristes* (Brazil, 2022)
Director Gustavo Vinagre spoke with Lázaro González (Film & Media).

Feb 3 | *Isabella* (Argentina/France, 2020)
Director Matías Piñeiro in conversation with Nicolás Pereda (Film & Media).

Sep 28 | *Films of Ana Vaz* (Brazil)*
Director Ana Vaz talked with Nicolás Pereda (Film & Media).

Apr 5 | *Eami* (Paraguay, 2022)*
Director Paz Encina in conversation with Nicolás Pereda (Film & Media).

Oct 28 | *First Time Home* (U.S., 2021)
Filmmaker Heriberto Ventura and his parents spoke with Natalia Brizuela (CLAS Chair; Spanish and Portuguese; Film & Media) and co-producer Seth Holmes (Environmental Science, Policy, and Management).

**Co-sponsored by the Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive.*

Faculty and Student Event Series

Academic initiatives from UC Berkeley scholars with support from CLAS

Seminar With Dr. Rocío Moreno

Dr. Rocío Moreno (Coca) spoke in a series that centered the themes of history, identity, and territory within the resistance movements that are led by Indigenous women in Mexico.

Feb 2 | *Mezcala, A Long Road of Resistance*
Rocío Moreno on her Coca community history project.

Feb 10 | *Screening: Resurrección* (Mexico, 2016)
Documenting the struggle to revive the Santiago River.

Feb 24 | *Screening: La Vocera* (Mexico, 2020)
With Ángel Sulub (Concejo Indígena de Gobierno).

Mar 2 | *Struggles for Rematriation From the South and North*
With Corrina Gould (Confederated Villages of Lisjan, San Francisco Bay Area).

These events were organized by Professor Diana Negrín (Geography), who specializes in topics related to territory, ethnicity, and social movements in Western Mexico.

Latin American Natures in Times of Environmental Crisis

This series examined how people from Latin America address pressing environmental issues, with presenters who are studying struggles for territorial and water rights, dignified livelihoods, food sovereignty, and environmental knowledge through their research, writing, and engaged scholarship.

Jan 19-20: *Researching Disputed Water Worlds in Latin America*
Andrea Ballesterio (University of Southern California).

Mar 2-3: *Transformative Agroecology and Territorial Markets in Mexico*
Mateo Mier y Terán (El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, ECOSUR).

Apr 10-11: *Monocrops, Agrobiopolitics, and Environmental Crises Latin America*
Kregg Hetherington (Concordia University).

These events were organized by Ph.D. students Jesús Alejandro García A., Andrés Caicedo, María Villalpando, and Ángela Castillo, of the Latin American and Caribbean Siconatures Working Group.

CLAS Co-sponsored Events 2022–2023

Funding and programmatic support for public seminars, lectures, cultural events, and conferences

Sep 29 | “The Anti-Fascist Demonstrations of 1942 and the Rise of Mass Nationalism in Brazil,”
with author Alexandre Fortes

Co-sponsored with the Department of History

Sep 30 - Oct 1 | Anticolonialism as Theory Symposium

Co-sponsored with the Association of Postcolonial Thought

Oct 3 | Luiz Gama: Brazil’s Frederick Douglass, with Bruno Rodriguez de Lima

Co-sponsored with the Center for the Study of Law and Society

Nov 8 | *The Right to Dignity: Housing Struggles, City Making, and Citizenship in Urban Chile*,
with author Miguel Pérez

Co-sponsored with the Center for Ethnographic Research

Feb 3 | *Feminismos afro-colombianos: Políticas anti-racistas, producción de conocimientos y activismos*
(Afro-Colombian Feminisms: Anti-Racist Politics, Knowledge Production, and Art-Activism),
with Glenda Palacios and Yanith Cristancho Segura

Co-sponsored with the Colaboratorio Feminista de Investigación, Acción e Imaginación (U. Tolima - U. Antioquia, Colombia)

Feb 7 | *In the Mouth of the Wolf: A Murder, a Cover-Up and the True Cost of Silencing the Press*,
with author Katherine Corcoran

Co-sponsored with the Graduate School of Journalism

Feb 15 | *Wixárika Bodies, Landscapes, and Accumulation of Environmental Epigenetic Triggers*,
with Salvador Contreras

Co-sponsored with the Institute for International Studies

Mar 10 | *Access to Reproductive Rights: Lessons From Latin America and the U.S.*,
with Caitlin Gerds and Ninde Molre

Mar 21 | Screening: *El Equipo* (United States, 2023), with director Bernardo Ruiz

Co-sponsored with the Human Rights Center

Apr 4-5 | Tinker Field Research Collaborative Grant Presentations

Co-sponsored with the Tinker Foundation

Apr 11 | *Organized Crime and Institutional Erosion in Latin America*, with Edgardo Buscaglia

Co-sponsored with the Latinx in Public Policy Working Group

Apr 14 | *Racismo y democracia en el Perú* (Racism and Democracy in Peru)

Co-sponsored with Students of Color in Public Policy

May 9 | *El movimiento estudiantil en el Chile posdictatorial* (The Student Movement in Post-Dictatorial Chile),
with Cristián Bellei and María Rojas Concha

May 9 | *Taller: Intro al Quechua* (Workshop: Introduction to Quechua)

Co-sponsored with the Andean Studies Working Group

Jun 29 | *Os Juma do Sul do Amazonas: Memória, cultura, identidade e preservação linguística com um dicionário digital multimídia* (The Juma in the South of the Amazon: Memory, Culture, Identity, and Linguistic Preservation with a Multimedia Digital Dictionary), with Boréa Juma, Mandéi Juma, Maytá Juma, and Wesley dos Santos

Co-sponsored with the Universidade Federal do Amazonas, Humaitá Campus (Brazil)



Photo by Matías Garrido Hollstein.

CHILE

Flags representing Indigenous peoples fly over a protest in Santiago's Plaza Baquedano, October 2019.

After Fifty Years, Can Chile Move Past the Legacy of Pinochet's Constitution?

By Antonia Mardones Marshall

The 50th anniversary of the military coup in Chile stirs up many emotions in a country where justice for the victims of state terrorism has been exceptionally scarce and where political divisions are still very present, perhaps now more than ever since the return of democracy. While it can be hard to look back on this dark period in our national history, this anniversary represents an important opportunity to reflect on the meaning and value of democracy.

The act of remembering and reflecting is especially relevant in a historical moment in which we observe the worldwide advance of conservative forces pushing back against many of the rights conquered in the past half century. While socioeconomic and environmental crises seem to announce the exhaustion of the neoliberal model and a feeling of poignant uncertainty spreads throughout society,

political forces are increasingly polarizing and the threat of new forms of authoritarianism is more evident than ever.

Chile has not been exempt from these global political trends. While praised for its democratic stability and economic growth during the past three decades, the country had rarely been in the spotlight since the jubilant return of democracy. This mild-mannered nation-state status changed drastically in October 2019, when millions of people throughout the country took to the streets in the largest protests in Chile's democratic history.

These protests were not organized by any political party or movement and had no unifying demands. They represented the spontaneous response of wide sectors of society overwhelmed by feelings of precariousness, distrust of politicians, and discontent with the prevailing socioeconomic model.

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After a month of continuous social unrest, Chile's various political parties reached an agreement to call for a referendum in May 2020 to decide whether the Pinochetera constitution should be replaced by a new charter written democratically by elected assembly members. The Constitution of 1980 had been identified by leftist and progressive political parties and social movements as responsible for institutionalizing the “neoliberal experiment” in Chile and thus as a main obstacle to enacting reforms that could bring more social justice to the country.

The global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had the double effect of putting an end to the massive street protests while delaying the constitutional plebiscite. Finally, on October 25, 2020, nearly 80 percent of Chileans voted in favor of engaging in a democratic process to replace the Constitution of 1980 with a new charter written by a Constitutional Convention elected for that exclusive purpose. In May 2021, the election of the convention members took place under unprecedented rules that secured gender parity, reserved seats for Indigenous peoples, and allowed for the participation of individuals with no specific political affiliation.

For the first time in Chilean history, the election of an extraordinarily diverse convention included equal numbers of men and women, representatives from the 10 Indigenous groups recognized by the Chilean state, and a diverse group of independent members, many of them activists representing social movements. The Constitutional Convention was charged with drafting a proposal for a new constitution within one year of July 4, 2021, after which the proposal would be submitted for a new national referendum.

Yet, after a year of work, the proposed constitution that the convention members presented to the country was rejected by 62 percent of the population in a national referendum on September 4, 2022. This was the first election in Chile's history that made voting mandatory for all adult citizens,¹ bringing to the polls close to five million new voters.² Furthermore, this event marked the first time in world history that a country rejected a constitution written by a democratically elected assembly.

In the wake of the 2022 plebiscite, traditional right-wing politicians appropriated the referendum's result, interpreting it as a triumph of conservative forces. Feeling empowered, reactionary political leaders began to attack many of the ideas that were central to the rejected proposal,

in particular those that would grant differentiated rights and promote the political participation of actors historically excluded from decision-making processes, such as Indigenous peoples, women, and the LGBTQI+ community.

Right-wing leaders—including those from the traditional right-wing coalition Chile Vamos (Let's Go Chile) and from the more recently created radical right-wing party, the Partido Republicano (Republican Party)—have been successful in convincing growing sectors of society that the idea of “plurinationality” is a threat to the unity and sovereignty of the Chilean nation, that gender parity rules go against fair competition in political elections, and that LGBTQI+ rights are part of an ideological gender agenda promoted by international



Photo by Cristina Dorador.

1. Until 2012, the vote was mandatory but only for those who voluntarily registered in the electoral rolls. Between 2012 and 2022, registration to vote was automatic and voting was voluntary.

2. In a column published in the CLAS blog, I analyze some of the factors that can explain why the overwhelming majority of people in Chile voted for the rejection option: <https://clasberkeley.wpcmsstaging.com/2022/10/25/chiles-constitutional-process-what-went-wrong-and-how-to-move-forward/>.

organizations like the United Nations to corrupt youth. These reactionary efforts are a backlash against the process of democratization that the country has been experiencing in recent decades and particularly since the social unrest of 2019.

Because a vast majority of Chileans voted to replace the Constitution of 1980 in the 2020 plebiscite and this vote is still valid, the rejection of the proposed constitution kicked off another attempt at a new constitution. However, the initial enthusiasm from important sectors of society during the first constitutional process has been replaced by a generalized feeling of disappointment, distrust, and exhaustion. The exuberant momentum towards a new constitution feels like a dream from which we were

abruptly awoken, a fractured relationship lost in the past without the possibility of closure.

In contrast to the previous attempt, the agreement reached in Congress for this second constitutional process allowed political parties to name members for an Expert Commission to write the first draft of the new constitution. This time, the same political parties that had been the target of the 2019 protests were paradoxically the ones to designate the people in charge of drafting the constitution—or at least a first version of it. This draft constitution would be the starting point from which an elected Constitutional Council would work, presenting amendments and proposing a final text to the country to be approved or rejected in a third national plebiscite on December 17, 2023.

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During the Constitutional Convention's opening on July 4, 2021, Elisa Loncón (right) and Jaime Bassa (left) lead a moment of silence for those killed during Chile's struggles.



In a polarized political climate, on May 7, 2023, the people of Chile participated in an election to choose members for the new Constitutional Council, the fourth constitution-related election in which Chileans have engaged in less than three years, for the second time with a mandatory vote for all adult citizens. This election of council members once again included a rule of gender parity to ensure equal number of women and men on the council. However, in contrast to the past process, this election did not allow for the participation of candidates independent from political parties. Also, only one member elected by Indigenous peoples was able to join the council: Alihuen Antileo, a representative from the largest Indigenous group in Chile, the Mapuche.³

Although polls had been showing the Partido Republicano as the favorite for this election, nobody expected the party to sweep the election. This alt-right party led by ex-presidential candidate José Antonio Kast took 23 of the council's 50 seats, giving them the 2/5 of votes needed to veto any proposal in the council.⁴ With an additional 11 seats gained by Chile Vamos,⁵ the right-wing parties surpass the 3/5 of votes that council members need to approve amendments to the Expert Commission's constitutional draft. Partido Republicano members had adamantly opposed both the first and second constitutional processes. Paradoxically, they now have the upper hand in drafting a constitution to replace the Pinochet-era charter they wanted to maintain from the start.

The other 16 seats on the Constitutional Council went to parties of the leftist government coalition, particularly the Partido Comunista (Communist Party), the Frente Amplio (Broad Front), and the Partido Socialista (Socialist Party), which for the first time broke its historical alliance with more centrist parties.⁶ The government coalition now finds itself in the uncomfortable position of either supporting a constitution written by a majoritarian pro-Pinochet council or, after three years of constitutional debate, rejecting the

3. However, some political parties included Indigenous candidates in their lists, and two Indigenous candidates of the *Revolución Democrática* (Democratic Revolution) party, Kinturay Melin and Julio Ñanco, were elected by the general population.

4. The total seats in the council is actually 51, counting the extranumerary seat won by the Indigenous candidate, Alihuen Antileo. However, one of the elected Partido Republicano candidates, Aldo Sanhueza, presented his resignation to the council after the feminist movement protested his participation (in 2019, he had been accused of sexual abuse). However, the Election Qualification Court rejected Sanhueza's resignation on the grounds that council members have not yet taken over their posts and it is not legal to renounce beforehand. Sanhueza did not appear at the council's inauguration ceremony, but traveled outside the country. His de facto refusal to participate in the constitutional process left the council with 50 members and the Partido Republicano (from which he resigned) with 22 seats.

5. Chile Vamos was established in 2015 by three parties: Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI, Independent Democratic Union), Renovación Nacional (National Renovation), and Evolución Política (Evópoli, Political Evolution).

6. This coalition also included the Partido Liberal (Liberal Party), the Federación Regionalista Verde Social (Regionalist Green Social Federation), and Acción Humanista (Humanist Action). The Frente Amplio includes three political parties with roots in the 2011 Chilean student movement, from which President Gabriel Boric emerged as a leader: *Revolución Democrática* (Democratic Revolution), Comunes (In Common), and the party of President Boric, *Convergencia Social* (Social Convergence).

proposed constitution and being resigned with trying to reform the Constitution of 1980 in Congress when the political environment becomes more propitious.

The big losers of the elections were the parties of the traditional center-left coalition: not one of them was able to secure a seat on the council. The Partido Socialista's switch from the Socialismo Democrático (Democratic Socialism) coalition to the Apruebo Dignidad coalition marked another shift in the political panorama.⁷ The Partido Radical (Radical Party) and the Partido por la Democracia (PPD, Party for Democracy) decided not to join the constitutional council election in a common list with the government coalition, but instead allied themselves with the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (PDC, Christian Democratic Party), with disastrous electoral results. The traditional right-wing coalition, Chile Vamos, also lost a large portion of their electoral base to the Partido Republicano. Until the election of President Gabriel Boric in December 2021, the two traditional coalitions had governed Chile since the return of democracy. Their loss of power may signal that people are, once again, mostly voting against "politics as usual."

Indeed, invalid and blank votes constituted the third majority of the constitutional council members election—nearly 22 percent of total votes—which confirms the theory of a protest vote. So, right-wing council members should be wary of interpreting their election as demonstrating majoritarian support for their ideas. Now the Partido Republicano must decide if they will be an honest broker in a constitutional debate they never wanted and reform the Constitution of 1980. They can support a new constitution with moderate changes that can represent broad sectors of society, so that this new charter can be approved and the country can turn the page and move forward. Or they can press for a partisan constitution that may be rejected. Front of mind is the impact this choice may have on the party's presidential aspirations in 2026.

While this new process represents a second opportunity to replace the Pinochet-era constitution for one written in democracy, it also presents a risk. If the next draft is not substantially different from the one still in force, it will legitimize a socioeconomic model that millions of people protested against in the first place. From my perspective, what is most crucial for a new constitution is that it seek to

7. The Socialismo Democrático (Democratic Socialism) coalition was created in 2021 by the Partido Socialista, the Partido Liberal, the Partido por la Democracia, and the Partido Radical. The creation of this coalition meant the isolation of the more-centrist Partido Demócrata Cristiano and the end of the historical alliance between socialists and Christian Democrats. Socialismo Democrático supported the election of Boric against the Partido Republicano presidential candidate, José Antonio Kast, and was then called to be part of the current administration. Apruebo Dignidad was created in 2021 to unite leftist parties and movements in a broad coalition, which included the Frente Amplio and the Communist Party, among others. This coalition presented a list for the election of constituent council members and for congressional candidates in 2021. After internal primaries, Apruebo Dignidad also presented Gabriel Boric as their candidate in the 2021 presidential elections.

enable the possibility of social change, instead of preventing it. Societies are in constant transformation, and we need a constitution that is able to adapt to new times and to secure and promote the political participation of civil society. The constitution thus needs to allow for the economic, social, political and cultural democratization of society.

The idea of democratization is particularly relevant given the context that gave rise to Chile's current constitution: it was written by the military junta and a designated commission and imposed in a fraudulent plebiscite in 1980 (Fuentes, 2013). According to former senator Jaime Guzmán (1979), who is considered the intellectual author behind the Constitution of 1980:

The Constitution must ensure that, if our adversaries manage to govern, they are constrained to follow an action not so different from the one we would desire, because—allow me the metaphor—the margin of alternatives that the field imposes on those who play in it is small enough to make it extremely difficult to do otherwise. (my translation)

Guzman's ideal was a protected democracy in which the constitution would make it very difficult to apply substantial changes to the neoliberal economic model imposed during the dictatorship, regardless of who occupied the presidential seat. Thus, the Constitution of 1980 not only sought to reverse the transformations achieved during the Allende era—in particular those related to policies promoting the redistribution of wealth—but also included a series of authoritarian enclaves and “locks” that prevented the political participation of a large portion of the population, given the obstacles they would discover when calling for social change. This constitution was meant to prevent the unfolding of democratic politics when, in the future, the military government left power. It was the opposite of democratization.

In this regard, it is crucial that a new constitution recognize the rights of those sectors that have been historically excluded, both decentralizing and deconcentrating power. Some important ideas from the rejected proposal that need to be discussed again relate to: how to ensure that people in marginalized territories throughout the country have a say in decisions that affect their environment, development, and well-being; how to secure reproductive rights for women and LGBTQI+ communities, as well as how to ensure their effective economic and political participation at all levels of society; and how to recognize Indigenous peoples' rights to land and self-determination.

These are precisely the issues the Partido Republicano and the traditional right-wing parties oppose the most. According to Antonia Rivas, a Chilean lawyer and anthropologist

specializing in Indigenous rights and one of the Expert Commission members assigned by the left-wing coalition:

In the Expert Commission, when we discuss the meaning of a social and democratic rule of law and what social rights the constitution should include, we just think differently and can't convince each other. What we are betting on is that we will arrive at an enabling constitutional proposal that opens spaces for democracy and political deliberation so whoever governs can move their program forward, with limits on the guarantee of people's rights and mechanisms for complaining when those rights are not secured. Since it will be difficult to include an expansive catalogue of rights, it is crucial that the new constitution includes a broad anti-discrimination clause and categorically recognizes the constitutional status of international treaties, something that is at risk with the actual composition of the Constitutional Council. (personal communication, May 10, 2023, my translation)

Given these adverse circumstances, the best option for progressive parties and movements today seems to be the push for a minimalist constitution that enables political debate and allows the advance of legislation promoting substantive equality.⁸ Overall, this new constitution needs to open spaces for political participation by society's subaltern groups, surpassing the representative democracy that today is in crisis. Only in this way will it be able to adapt to an ever-changing society and find the legitimizing power it needs to be approved and appropriated by the people.

On the 50th anniversary of the military coup, Chile deserves a new social contract that can finally put an end to the authoritarian enclaves that have prevented political participation and debate, a new constitution that can enable the social transformations society needs so no one feels left behind. In an increasingly polarized political climate, it remains to be seen whether, as a country, we are up to the task or we will need another political cycle of crisis and unrest to realize that the world's neoliberal experiment has long since failed.

Antonia Mardones Marshall is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at UC Berkeley and was a CLAS 2022 Summer Dissertation Fellow.

References for this article are online at clas.berkeley.edu.

8. The idea of “substantive equality” recognizes that there are structural and cultural conditions that prevent the political participation of marginalized groups and thus the need to enact policies that counter the pervasive persistence of discrimination and exclusion against women and minorities. It contrasts with the idea of “formal equality” that right-wing parties defend, by which measures such as gender parity and reserved seats for Indigenous peoples in elections are considered unfair because they would interfere with the democratic principle of “one person, one vote.”

Britt Dawson

Anthropology

Building religious community at the border, Mexico

Maria Ochoa Villicana

Spanish and Portuguese

Feminist perspective on Mexican border art, Mexico

Juan Campos

Political Science

Organized crime and anti-police violence, Mexico

Anaid Cárdenas-Navarrete

Integrative Biology

Ecosystems and black howler monkeys, Mexico

Julia Frankenbach

History

Spanish, Guatemala

Cristina Méndez

Education

Mam, Guatemala

Ilianna Vasquez

Spanish and Portuguese

Recentering sex work in colonial Mexico

Tania Osorio Harp

Architecture

Architecture and domestic labor, Mexico

Kelsey Alford-Jones

Energy & Resources Group

Land and environmental justice, Guatemala

Deibi Daryin Sibrian

Environmental Science, Policy, and Management

Nahuat resistance to dams, El Salvador

Alexandra Reep

Public Policy

Traditional markets and the food web, Colombia

Andrés Julián Caicedo Salcedo

Environmental Science, Policy, and Management

Glyphosates, agriculture, and health, Colombia

Isabel Peñaranda Currie

City and Regional Planning

Formal and informal land markets, Colombia

Emily Fjaellen Thompson

Anthropology

Quechua, Peru

Melina Marie Holder

Development Practice

Housing, land, and property rights, Peru

Emily Fjaellen Thompson

Anthropology

Approaching trauma through memory art, Peru

Lucy G. Hackett

Agriculture and Resource Economics

Environmental markets and agriculture, Chile

Vanessa Navarro Rodriguez

Political Science

Politics and the Mapuche community, Chile

2023 TRAVEL GRANTS TO
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LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES
ASSOCIATION, CANADA

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Spanish and Portuguese

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Alejandra Decker

Spanish and Portuguese

Mining culture in historical Mexico

Bruno Anaya Ortiz

Rhetoric

Legal communities and politics in Latin America

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José Marrero Rosado
Anthropology
Identifying victims of a mass grave, Puerto Rico

Rebecca Cardinali
Agriculture and Resource Economics
Impacts of online sex education, Colombia

Drew Kiser
English
Spanish, Colombia

KEY

Tinker Field Research Collaborative Grant Recipients
Name, Academic Program, Research Topic, Location

LASA Congress Travel Grant Recipients
Name, Academic Program, Research Topic

Foreign Language and Area Studies Grant Recipients
Name, Academic Program, Language, Location



Alejandro Múnera
Spanish and Portuguese
Queer culture under dictatorship, Brazil

Mulika Musyimi
Public Health
Portuguese, Brazil

Ritika Goel
Political Science
Populism and inequality, Brazil

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Melina Holder
Development Practice, Nahuatl
United States

Jesse Nazario
Ethnic Studies, Nahuatl
United States

Megan Noor
Law, Spanish
United States

Johanna Reyes Ortega
Political Science, Portuguese
United States



Anaid Cárdenas-Navarrete
Integrative Biology

Anaid observed black howler monkey troops in Palenque, Chiapas, Mexico. Her research examined the interaction and environment at the interface between the monkeys' habitat and human habitations and development.

2022–2023 Student Research



Vanessa Navarro Rodriguez
Political Science

Vanessa took this photo of Mapuche resistance street art. Through interviews and research in Santiago and Temuco, Chile, she began an analysis of the diversity of views in the Mapuche community.

Alejandro Múnera

Spanish and Portuguese

Alejandro's photo shows issues of *O Lampião da Esquina*, a groundbreaking publication that was one of the first directed at the homosexual community in Brazil. He researched queer culture under dictatorship in Rio de Janeiro.



Photos From the Field

Deibi Daryin Sibrian

Environmental Science, Policy, and Management

Deibi's photo captures a Nahuat Pipil tribal council meeting in El Salvador as they plan the campaign against damming the Sensunapan River, which was part of his research.



A Struggle That Transcends Borders

By Diana Negrín

On February 24, 2023, the Center for Latin American Studies at UC Berkeley screened Lucía Kaplan’s *La Vocera* (2020), the third of a four-part event series highlighting the struggles for the defense of “territory and life” in Mexico. In her introduction to the film, Dr. Rocío Moreno told the audience that “we don’t need to go to Chiapas” to support Indigenous peoples’ struggles or to participate in efforts to take care of Indigenous land, because those battles also exist right here in the United States. Moreno is a member of the Coca Indigenous community of Mezcala, located along the coast of Lake Chapala in the state of Jalisco.

Throughout this CLAS-sponsored series, Moreno and I wanted to underscore that the struggles of the South are also present north of the Mexico–U.S. border. The polluted waters, ecocide, and public health crises of the Santiago River in Jalisco exposed in Eugenio Polgovsky’s *Resurrection* (2016) have their counterpart in the Central Valley of California, where human lives, soil, and waterways also bear the residues of capital-intensive development projects called *megaproyectos* in Spanish.

Beyond exposing these struggles, we wanted to invite people to consider that transformative grassroots practices for ecological and social revitalization are equally present in the North and the South, despite the dire state of our environmental and sociocultural landscapes. Dr. Moreno’s inaugural talk emphasized this shared plight through the decolonial and community-based methodologies that have reinforced the history, foodscapes, and educational autonomy of the Coca people alongside legal battles for land restitution in the town of Mezcala, Jalisco. These same strategies for biocultural revitalization are also being put to work here in the East Bay by the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, an organization run by urban Indigenous women who have worked to recover the sacred land, language, and practices in Huchiun—the ancestral land of the Lisjan Ohlone people.

With explicit recognition of the woman-led work taking place across Indigenous communities, the effort of “rematriation” was intentionally placed at the center of the final conversation between Corrina Gould (Ohlone) of Sogorea Te’ Land Trust and Moreno, who also serves on the Indigenous Governing Council of Mexico’s *Congreso Nacional Indígena* (CNI, National Indigenous Congress). Sharing their respective communities’ history of colonization and resistance, Gould and Moreno both provided a clear invitation to critically re-envision our relationship to the land where we live in order to make visible that other worlds are possible, no matter where we stand.



A billboard in Berkeley, California, calls for the city to “rematriate the land.”
(Photo courtesy of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust.)

Sogorea Te' Land Trust Is Huchiun, A Territory of the Lisjan Ohlone

By Rocío Moreno (translated by Deborah Meacham)

La *tierra*, the land, the possession of territory continues to be the main demand of the Indigenous peoples in any geographic location. Several Latin American countries have seen efforts to return the land to its first inhabitants. Throughout the Americas, we are still witnessing a colonization process that began in the 16th century. Since that time, the land has become the spoils of war. The colonizers fight to take the land and possess it, while the Native peoples struggle to keep the land and resist. Probably one of the fiercest battles is being waged in the United States, where capitalist power is protected and entrenched. Currently, the United States recognizes more than 500 American Indian tribes and Alaska Native entities at a federal level, but there are also many Indigenous peoples without official recognition (here and throughout the Americas). In addition to this lack of recognition, there is no communal land, which has been the ownership structure of the Indigenous peoples since ancient times. We cannot forget that the United States has not seen any real agrarian distribution—the question of whose land is it has not even put on the table for discussion.

The situation of the Native peoples in the United States is just as precarious, subject to racism, and unequal as it is in the rest of the Americas. Our brothers and sisters who inhabit these lands must fight a series of terrible battles against the great capitalist monster that is provoking a crisis of civilization around the world. That's why their struggle and their anti-capitalist strategies must be known by all of us who share the principle of fighting for life, for the recovery of life in our territories.

I've observed that the struggles of the North have their own forms and demands, and I am teaching myself to listen to and understand their history, since that is where their main demands are found, including the right to land and the right to exist as a culture, as a people. Both are broad goals, and once they are reached, more cracks will be opened in the foundations of capitalism. A few weeks ago, I met two powerful women, who are doing just this with their work in the north of the continent: Corrina Gould and Johnella LaRose, who founded the Sogorea Te' Land Trust in 2015.

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EXpropriate
the LAND

SOGOREA TE' LAND TRUST

A History of Dispossession or a History of Dignified Rebellion?

We must begin with their history, their past. Unfortunately, it's practically the same as with all colonized peoples. When the Spanish missions arrived, the colonization process began, and with it, the displacement of the Indigenous peoples who lived along the Pacific Ocean, in the forests, and on the immense plains. Unlike other Indigenous peoples elsewhere in the Americas, they were soon dispossessed and scattered. Indeed, their extermination continues today because the historical account still fails to recognize that these lands belonged to Native peoples. This territory includes the entire San Francisco Bay Area in California. Over the years, the area became a lucrative location, and little by little, the Lisjan Ohlone people were forgotten, as their territory, Huchiun, had been taken from them. In that painful past, Sogorea Te' remembers that they are still there.

In the present-day city of Oakland, California, home to the Lisjan Ohlone people, these two women decided to recommence this forgotten journey. Since there was no way to secure recognition of the right to communal land for the Lisjan Ohlone people, these women created the Sogorea Te' Land Trust. It is important to point out that the Lisjan Ohlone people are not federally recognized. Practically their entire territory is inhabited by capitalism, as it includes major cities like Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, Piedmont, Emeryville, and Albany. I think there are plenty of reasons why capitalism suffers from amnesia, however, things are changing thanks to the efforts of Sogorea Te'. In fact, they are forcing the cities and their citizens to recognize that these lands belonged to an Indigenous people. Their movement has grassroots support and a broader community that will fight side by side with them, which is why their struggle, the struggle of the Indigenous peoples of this region and of the entire country, is so complicated—it seems impossible, yet once they start back on this path, they begin to be surprised at the willingness of so many people to fight for change and for life.

Sogorea Te' has community spaces where they are connecting with the land, places where they are able to plant, to harvest. They eat there, they talk and carry on, and they also learn and share with all members of the community, not just those who are Lisjan Ohlone. Now, it is a space for all the different people who inhabit that territory (Mexicans, African Americans, Mayans, Salvadorans, etc.). One of the activities that moved me the most was the teaching of the Chochenyo

Reflection by a UC Berkeley Student

The landscapes, history, and circumstances of the town of Mezcala in Jalisco, Mexico, could not seem more different from those of Berkeley, California. Yet, through Dr. Rocío Moreno's four-part series, it became evident that although thousands of miles stand between these two places, a common fight exists. As a student of Development Studies in Latin America, the chance to learn about the Coca people of the Lake Chapala region in Mexico, the fight for Indigenous sovereignty on both sides of the Mexico–U.S. border, and the role women play in these struggles was a highlight of my last semester at UC Berkeley.

My family has roots in historic Coca territory, and I was born and raised in Amah Mutsun Ohlone territory, making the “Struggles for Rematriation from the South and North” discussion between Corrina Gould, from the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, and Dr. Moreno a bridging of two geographies. The realities and possibilities of Indigenous land stewardship are present in both places, and hearing from both women inspired me and motivated me to think more about the significance of the landscapes I take for granted in my hometown in Salinas, my hometown in Jalisco, and the new home I have made in Berkeley for the past two years. Dr. Moreno's *lucha* and her leadership in Mezcala and in Mexico's National Indigenous Congress, despite the barriers she has faced as an Indigenous woman in Mexico and in the United States, show how the universal fight for “life and territory” is not limited by borders. Her work is an inspiration, and this series was exactly the kind of material I expected to encounter and engage with at UC Berkeley.

— Ilyne Junuén Castellanos,
UC Berkeley Global Studies Major

language. Despite the fact that the Ohlone people do not have federal recognition and especially in light of their tumultuous past, they have managed to preserve and continue to use the Chochenyo language. What an admirable achievement! In their language and in their connection to their land, Huchiun, the Lisjan Ohlone people exist today.

Returning Indigenous Land to Indigenous Hands

The primary goal of this organization is the return of Indigenous lands to the Indigenous peoples. “We have survived more than two centuries of genocide and colonization during the Spanish, Mexican, and American eras,” they say. “Today, we continue to inhabit our ancestral

homeland, fighting for our sacred sites and revitalizing our cultural practices.”

Rematriate the Land

The women of this organization carry bags and t-shirts with the motto “Rematriate the land,” which is, of course, a provocative phrase since it assumes that women play an essential role in this fight for land. Sogorea Te’ calls on Native and non-Native peoples alike to heal and to transform the legacies of colonization, genocide, and patriarchy. They began their journey in 1999 with a campaign in Vallejo, California, to block plans for a construction project that threatened the foundations of a 3,500-year-old Karkin Ohlone village. In their first organized action, they convened a spiritual camp to stop the construction project.

“We went to save the land in Sogorea Te’,” Johnella remembers. “But actually, the land saved us. [...] We didn’t really understand how much we needed the land until then.” These stories about their reencounter with the land are seen in all the territories of Indigenous peoples. It’s like the tip of the iceberg that Indigenous peoples see first, and from there, they are able to dive more deeply to understand the full dimension of what happened. That is why it is so important to start with that reencounter.

Sogorea Te’ has already begun the profound work we must undertake in this moment of crisis. Their work, their commitment, their tenacity in conserving and transmitting their language, in creating common spaces, in giving voice to the words of Native women, and above all, in asking, “Whose land is it?” This is the beginning of a future return of the land.

“We have spent 15 years in the Bay Area organizing the Indigenous community. And honestly, all the issues we’re struggling with come down to the land. You know, the land was taken, and that was such a deep wound. The seizure of the land, the peoples’ heart, was the cause of so many problems. And I think, with the land trust, and you know, the land itself, I think that’s really going to help us find our way back.”

— Johnella LaRose,
Co-Founder/Director of Sogorea Te’ Land Trust

Johnella’s words are true and painful. The Indigenous peoples must find their way back. We must retake our lands and the forms and structures of community that are so profoundly needed today. With their fight, I realize that California is an Indian state. It is the home of the descendants of the ancient peoples who took care of the Pacific Ocean for thousands of years, the enormous and beautiful forests, the fertile plains that make this region so amazing.



Photo from desInformémonos, courtesy of Rocío Moreno.

Rocío Moreno.

Sogorea Te’ teaches us that only a few are needed to start a worthy struggle in a territory dominated by capitalism; it also teaches us that alliances must be diversified and strengthened not just among the Native peoples of the South (Mexico) and North (United States), but with other cultures such as African Americans and urban inhabitants who also fight for life. It also teaches us find strength in our history and, thus, return to the old path, which will allow us to make it possible for the land to be truly returned to the hands of the Indigenous peoples.

¡Nunca mas un territorio, sin nosotrxs! Never again a territory without us!

¡Rematriate the land!

Rocío Moreno received her doctorate in social sciences from the Universidad de Guadalajara in 2022 and is the representative from Mezcala for the Indigenous Governance Council of Mexico’s *Congreso Nacional Indígena* (CNI, National Indigenous Congress). In April 2022, she sought refuge in Northern California following retaliation for her work securing Coca land rights in Lago de Chapala, Mexico.

Diana Negrín is Affiliate Faculty in the Department of Geography at UC Berkeley, specializing in topics related to territory, ethnicity, and social movements in Western Mexico.

An earlier version of this article originally ran in Spanish on the *desInformémonos* website in December 2022.

The author (right) interviews vendor Luz Dila in the Galería El Porvenir, Cali.
(Photo by Fabián Villa.)

RESEARCH

Lessons From a Traditional Food Market, Where Culture and Cuisine Converge

By Alex Reep

Surrounded by a symphony of cilantro, oregano, and citronella, I'm seated on the concrete floor of a bustling market listening to Luz Dila describe her routine as a *campesina* (farmer) in the outskirts of Cali, Colombia. On the busiest market days (Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays), she wakes up at midnight, hops on her horse, and trots about her farm to gather up bushels of freshly cut herbs and produce. She loads the bushels onto horseback, rides a few miles to the main road, ties up her horse, and catches a bus to the market at 3 a.m. Three hours later, she arrives at the *galería*, a traditional food market, where she tastefully arranges her produce on plastic crates and waits for customers to arrive. Most people are still sipping their first coffee of the morning, but Luz has been hard at work for hours.

On a typical day in a traditional Colombian food market like the Galería El Porvenir, you can go from shopping for

potatoes and *lulo* (a tart regional fruit), to having a chat with a *campesino* about the land they steward, to enjoying a filling, freshly cooked meal based on a family recipe. Comfort food abounds, like the *sobrebarriga a la criolla*—flank steak with *salsa criolla*, a tomato-based sauce, served on a bed of rice. Lines wrap around the block in the early morning for *sancochito de pescado*, a fish and vegetable stew that's brightened with a wedge of lime.

You can step back and admire people from all walks of life converging in the hunt for low-cost, high-quality traditional ingredients. *Galerías* are major players in the city's "food environment," the space where consumers make the food choices that are a part of their daily lives. The relative affordability, accessibility, convenience of preparation, and desirability of ingredients in the *galerías* all play a significant role in determining peoples' food choices, diets, and consequently, nutrition and health.

The city of Santiago de Cali, in the southwest of Colombia, is fortunate to have six traditional food markets, the Galerías El Porvenir, Alameda, Santa Elena, La Floresta, Alfonso López, and Siloé. These galerías provide more than food—they are local epicenters of social, cultural, and economic development that offer employment opportunities and locally grown ingredients used to preserve gastronomic traditions.

Over time, the pervasive sugarcane plantations in the Valle de Cauca and widespread lack of cold chain storage have resulted in decreased agricultural diversity and an increased reliance on imported shelf-stable foods (Aronson, 2019). As a result, the galerías have become one of the most affordable options for accessing fresh food products. They are a unique space in which vendors sell produce brought directly from farms, making the galerías the meeting point between the city and countryside and one of the only places where urban consumers can directly encounter the origin of their food.

The Importance of Local Food Networks

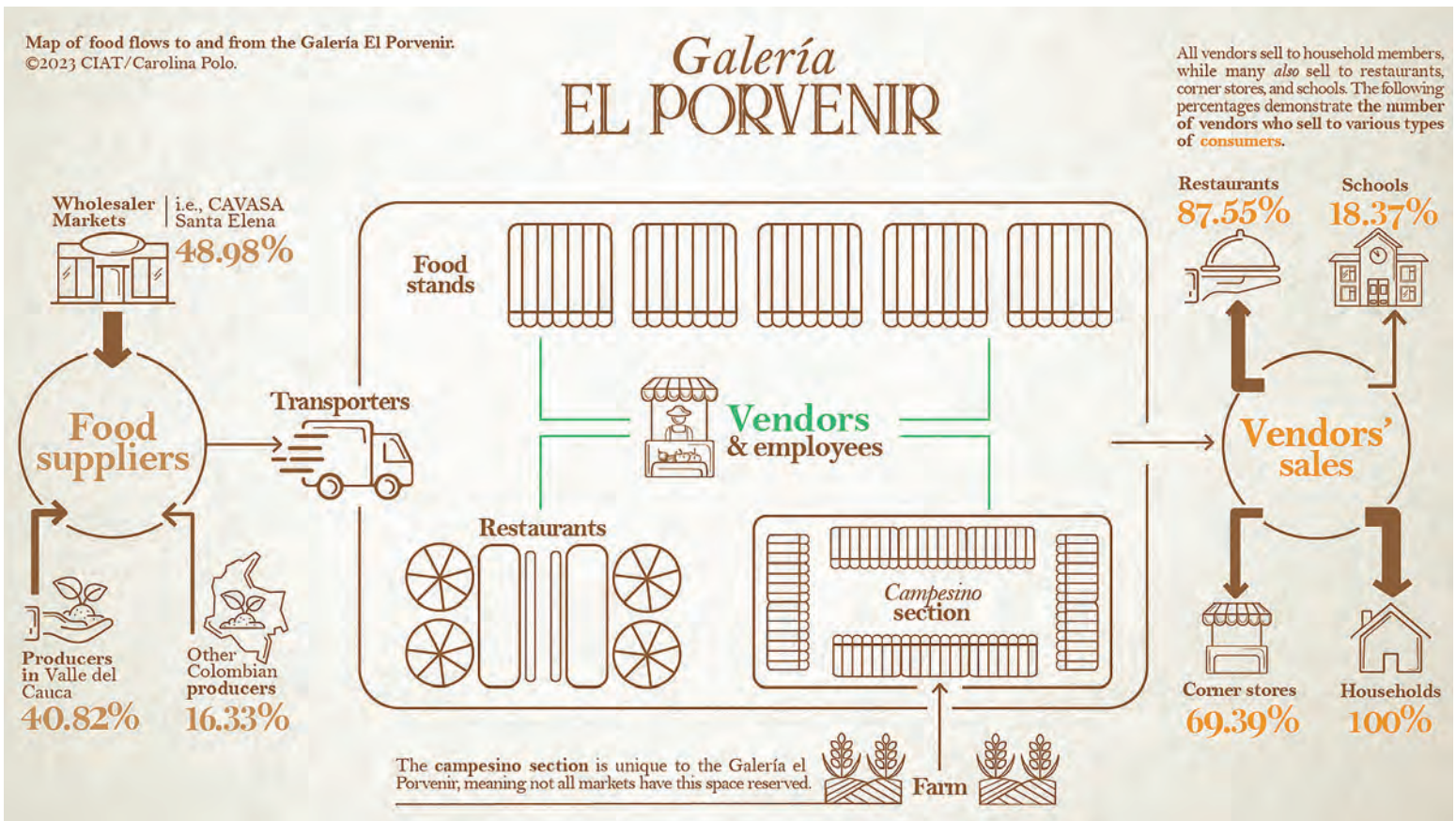
Food flow analyses in urban environments describe how a city obtains food from surrounding regions, which helps explain the ways in which a city feeds its populace (Moschitz & Frick, 2021). This information is important to stakeholders interested in making changes in the food

system to improve local food and nutritional security. The food supply chain does not include food consumption and disposal, but involves: 1) the primary production of food; 2) value-adding activities of storage, transportation, and processing; and 3) food distribution through markets (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2021). Traditional food supply chains are characterized as being spatially short, handling locally produced food, and involving a relatively small number of small-scale producers, intermediaries, and smaller enterprises (ibid.).

Measuring local food flows can help policymakers and other food system stakeholders to counter the complexities of the globalized food system by re-localizing the food supply. Additionally, using more locally sourced food products cuts the greenhouse gas emissions produced by transportation and storage. These efforts can help cities and regions increase their resilience in the face of globalization and increased anonymity of markets (Moschitz & Frick, 2021). Supply-chain disruptions caused by conflict and COVID-19, for example, have caused citizen-consumers and city administrators alike to acknowledge the importance of strengthening food systems at the local level and promoting diverse supply chains for local food products (Moschitz & Frick, 2021).

Traditional supply chains are described as “invisible in national statistics.” They are rarely included in

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governmental social protection programs, which makes them more vulnerable, despite their role as key nutrient providers filling gaps left by supermarkets and nontraditional food supply chains (FAO, 2021). The lack of data on food flows through traditional markets, a crucial market segment, limits the scope of city programs and challenges the ability to make improvements where structural changes are necessary. Additional studies of local markets and broader local value chains are required to develop informed policy that strengthens the resilience of local food systems for the food security of city residents.

With the support of a research grant funded by the Tinker Foundation and the Center for Latin American Studies at UC Berkeley, I spent two and a half months, from June through August 2022, working as a researcher with the Alliance of Bioversity International and the *Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical* (CIAT, International Center for Tropical Agriculture). I conducted a case study of the Galería El Porvenir marketplace in Cali, Colombia, to profile a segment of the city's supply system. This consumer study is described by the Alliance as "Lever 1," crucial for enacting change at the nexus of agriculture, environment, and nutrition, with the goal of "reshaping the food environment and consumer behavior toward healthy and sustainable diets" (Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture, 2019).

In the course of my research, I interviewed 116 market vendors and consumers in the Galería El Porvenir. These conversations offered insight into what food is being offered, what is in high demand, where the city's ingredients come from, and where they're going. Beyond food flows, the interviews explored markets' capacity to feed people with time and budget limitations, the price and perception of the quality of the food being offered, and what elements of these traditional markets should be considered in the development of policies to promote healthier and more sustainable diets. Data from less formal, traditional markets (such as Colombian galerías) are rarely incorporated into broader studies of



Key information about an average consumer at the Galería.

city food systems, which limits understanding of their value to the food security of locals, particularly lower-income city residents.

Who Are the Galería Consumers and Vendors?

The average galería consumer is a 45-year-old woman of *Mestiza* (Spanish and Indigenous) heritage, who buys ingredients for her household in a lower-income neighborhood of the city, very likely walking distance (within one or two kilometers) from the market itself. She likes shopping in the Galería El Porvenir because she appreciates the low prices, the proximity to her home, personal relationships with the vendors, and the freshness of the produce and meats. When she can't get what she's looking for at the galería, she'll visit a supermarket, where



Key information about an average vendor at the Galería.

she can find grains or processed foods in greater variety. Given that galerías are typically open only between 6 a.m. and 2 p.m., supermarkets are also conveniently open for people after their workday ends.

The average galería vendor is a *Mestizo* man, with a primary or secondary school education, who has owned his food stand for more than 30 years and doesn't sell anywhere else. He sources his products from merchants he likely doesn't know well, either in Cali or just outside, particularly the wholesale markets CAVASA and Santa Elena. In an average week, he'll sell to between 10 and 70 customers. The greatest threats to his business are the rising price of products, the high cost of transportation, and competition from supermarkets and other vendors in the Galería El Porvenir. He wastes very little food, if any

at all, because leftovers are discounted or donated.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Galería El Porvenir offers an opportunity for people of all backgrounds to find fresh ingredients and to learn more about their local food system. Despite the fact that the majority of food vendors source their products through intermediaries rather than directly from small-scale producers, the majority of the market vendors and food processors (workers who wash, chop, and re-package ingredients) have family connections with the countryside. They bring ancestral knowledge and rural traditions to the galerías.

Everyday consumers are also extremely knowledgeable about the influence of global hyperinflation, the effect of Colombia's export-heavy economy, and the impact of wars, strikes, and supply-chain disruptions on the food supply system. People from a wide range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds readily discuss the consequences of agroindustry and monoculture cropping systems on Colombia's fragile biodiverse ecosystems.

A consistent theme from my conversations with both market consumers and vendors is a deep appreciation for food products from *campesinos*, who are a valuable component of the Galería El Porvenir and maintain their own section of the market. Galería consumers and vendors alike suggest that public policies and governmental subsidies should support

campesinos directly to: reduce agroindustry monocultures (and, thus, the use of chemicals in Colombian agriculture); increase the availability of organic produce for market consumers; and support agricultural livelihoods as a means of protecting the countryside from rural violence by offering productive alternatives for young people. Vendors recommend recognizing the *campesinos* in the Galería El Porvenir by adding signs in the *campesino* section advertising that it's an ecological or organic market. Yeisy Duran, the leader of the Asociación de Usuarios de la Plaza de Mercado El Porvenir (Asopor, El Porvenir Marketplace Users Association), argues that "everyone should help the *campo*, because it sustains us all."

Three major themes stood out in the conversations

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I shared with the vendors and consumers in the Galería El Porvenir. People were interested in ways to compete with commercial supermarkets, strategies to address price fluctuation while ensuring food quality, and the galerías' potential to have a positive impact on nutrition and food security in the city.

Competing With Supermarkets

Vendors want to revitalize the Colombian tradition of shopping at the Galería El Porvenir by improving the appearance of and experience within the space. Approximately one half of surveyed vendors (51 percent) and consumers (53 percent) emphasized the importance of improving the infrastructure, appearance, and hygiene within the Galería El Porvenir as a means of keeping food products safe and competing with supermarkets.

Among the surveyed vendors, 74 percent agreed that the best way to attract more consumers is to find a way to lower prices. Vendors proposed creating a galería vendors' union to compete with big markets that benefit from larger purchasing power, in addition to having the galería's administrative staff coordinate with intermediaries to facilitate sourcing food products for vendors, who typically work and negotiate alone.

Although traditional supply chains are often characterized as chaotic and inefficient, their flexibility offers a critical outlet to receive a heterogenous supply of food products from smallholder farmers and sell a range of affordable food products to urban consumers with a diversity of demands (Guarín, 2013). In contrast with global value chains and supermarkets, which enforce stringent procurement standards, the relative informality of traditional food markets allows them to absorb uneven supply from smallholder farmers producing food products with a lack of standardization. The ability to sell to a mix of traditional, modern, or transitioning agrifood systems is essential to the job security of small-scale producers, who globally account for one third of the food supply (Ricciardi et al., 2018).

Price Fluctuations and Food Quality

Shoppers in the Galería El Porvenir tend to be hyper-aware of changes in price (month to month, week to week, stall to stall), in addition to how the causes of unstable prices likewise affect food quality and availability. Forty percent of surveyed consumers attributed price fluctuations to increasingly variable weather conditions when extreme temperatures dry out the fields or rainstorms destroy crops, accelerate rot, and wash out highways. One patron summarized, "The climate is changing a lot, so the prices are changing, too."



Photo by Fabián Villa.

Beyond environmental challenges, complications from the COVID-19 pandemic and roadway shutdowns during the national strikes of 2021 caused record-level transportation and supply chain disruptions in Cali over the past three years (2020-2022). As one consumer noted, "After the pandemic and national strike, everything changed. All the prices started rising. The prices go up every time we shop, and very few things become more affordable. Now, we've become accustomed to buying and using less, rationing."

Furthermore, several consumers and vendors connected the ongoing war in Ukraine with the rising prices of agricultural inputs like fertilizers and pesticides and, thus, the cost of everyday ingredients. "Ultimately," one consumer summarized, "it all depends on the international socioeconomic and sociopolitical situation."

Healthy Diets

Forty percent of consumers mentioned a need for greater educational campaigns to teach the public about what food is nutritious, where their food comes from, the benefits of a



In the foreground from left to right, El Porvenir vendors Yesenia Orrego, James Hernández, and Celso Elvis Ordóñez store produce at day's end.

healthy diet, how to buy fresh ingredients on a budget, and how to prepare food in a safe way that saves time and minimizes waste. Given their unique ability to serve and nourish people under time and budget limitations, one consumer noted that galerías can strategically help locals “increase our recognition that we are what we eat and that we’re lucky to have rich soil and nutritious agricultural products.”

Primary Lesson: Treasure the Galería

The marketplace paints a picture of a segment of Colombian life in this place and time: the crops grown in the Valle del Cauca this season, the myriad of people who influence the city (from the Pacific Coast to the Western and Central Andes), and the ingredients that feed the restaurant industry and citizenry of Cali. Lessons from the Galería El Porvenir case study can be applied to public policy initiatives to address the barriers that food producers face in establishing long-term economic profitability, in addition to the barriers consumers face in accessing fresh, affordable, and nutritious food.

The galería is a unique space that combines campesinos who grow a wide variety of produce, chefs serving traditional comfort food, knowledgeable and experienced vendors who know the best of their product, and consumers from diverse sectors of Colombian society. It reminds us that our consumption is an opportunity to promote conservation: when we buy local products grown in the unique environmental conditions surrounding our city, we promote small-scale farmers’ efforts to preserve ingredients that color our collective palates. There’s a reason why “galería” is a term used for both food and fine art.

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References for this article are online at clas.berkeley.edu.

RESEARCH

Creating Collaborative Learning Spaces for Critical Environmental Social Scientists

By Ángela Castillo-Ardila, Sebastián Rubiano-Galvis, María Villalpando Páez, and Andrés Caicedo

In April 2023, ten graduate students and early-career scholars from UC Berkeley, UC Merced, and the University of San Francisco met at the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS) at UC Berkeley in a three-hour forum to explore and discuss the craft of narrating the political and environmental lives of plants, animals, elements, and infrastructures from different parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. During the event, participants shared texts depicting these “more-than-human actors” encountered during their fieldwork in Latin America and the United States.

These experimental accounts included an array of subjects: a hydroelectric dam, a chemical substance used in gold extraction, a fungus collapsing the Latin American

oil palm industry, a contentious encounter between a dog and a possum, and a montane hummingbird living above the treeline in the tropical Andes. Each piece narrated a unique story about a socio-environmental conflict, offering an account from an experimental and unconventional perspective. The stories were all carefully read and discussed by the participants, who identified different issues in their accounts of these beings. In some examples, the entities were attributed agency in seemingly artificial ways. Conversely, there were cases where more-than-human bodies appeared to possess no capacity to influence the world at all.

This activity was part of the workshop, “Narrating More-Than-Human Politics in Latin America,” facilitated

The meeting of the “Transformative Agro-Ecology” workshop held at CLAS, March 2023.



Photo courtesy of the Latin American and Caribbean Sociocultures Working Group.

by Professor Kregg Hetherington (Concordia University) and sponsored by CLAS. As a political and environmental anthropologist with extensive expertise in bureaucracy, agriculture, and the state, Hetherington has pioneered approaches that examine the dynamics of agrarian reform and development projects in Latin America through the lens of multispecies relationships. In the context of the growing field of environmental studies, Hetherington and the workshop participants aimed to develop innovative conceptual and narrative frameworks to address the connections between human and more-than-human worlds that permeate Latin American and Caribbean politics. The workshop provided participants with a theoretical perspective, while simultaneously fostering a collaborative space.

This workshop was part of the event series, *Latin American Natures in Times of Crises*, organized by UC Berkeley's Latin American and Caribbean Socionatures Working Group (LAC Socionatures). Funded through a one-year grant from CLAS and the U.S. Department of Education, the series looked at the tensions and forces that shape environmental conflicts in the region, exploring how these disputes intersect with politics, economics, race, ecology, and gender.

Natures in Crises:

Water, Food, and More-Than-Humans

LAC Socionatures is an interdisciplinary community formed in 2021 whose members are dedicated to exploring the histories, dynamics, and conflicts related to the co-constitution of nature and society (hence the group name) throughout Latin America and its shifting boundaries. As part of our efforts to offer a collective space where graduate students at UC Berkeley can learn about and discuss current research projects on environmental politics in Latin America and the Caribbean, we designed an event series consisting of public talks and workshops focused on three topics: water, food and agroecology, and more-than-human beings. Our nontraditional format, which pairs an expert presentation with a participatory activity, emerged from our own dissatisfaction with the conventional 45-minute talk followed by a curated Q&A



Photo by thilbaudanson.

The bronze-tailed comet (*Polyonemus caroli*), a hummingbird native to the Andes.

session and other graduate students' frequent complaints about the isolating conditions of academic research. To address those issues, we proposed a format that encourages extended conversations, experimental writing, and collective learning and feedback.

The three-part event series *Latin American Natures in Times of Crises* was designed to provide participants with an initial exposure to the event topic through a public talk based on current research, followed by an environment conducive to sharing concepts, methodologies, and techniques. Adhering to the traditional definition of a workshop as a place where skilled individuals learn and practice the art of creation, we envisaged our workshops as both material and relational forums for practicing the craft of thinking with and against "socionatures" throughout the Americas.

The first event, "Disputed Water Worlds," featured a talk by Andrea Ballesterro, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Southern California. Her presentation examined the concepts that have emerged from ethnographic encounters with the "techno-legal devices" used to understand, produce, and govern water in Costa Rica. Following her talk, Ballesterro facilitated a workshop



Photo by Walter Canadino

Pirris Hydroelectric Dam, San Carlos de Tarrazú, Costa Rica.

with more than a dozen graduate students who presented “flash ethnographies”—short, incisive ethnographic pieces inspired by their fieldwork—that explored water as a relational substance, always in tension or articulation with other elements, beings, infrastructures, etc.

In our collective discussion of these pieces, Ballestero introduced four interpretative categories for the consideration of emergent water scholars: form, temporality, infrastructure, and relationality. These categories, she suggested, offer a condensed yet illuminating perspective on the crucial dimensions that structure global waterscapes.

At the second event, “Transformative Agro-Ecology,” Mateo Mier y Terán Giménez, a member of the Agroecology Group at El Colegio de la Frontera Sur in Mexico, facilitated an interactive talk and workshop on both agroecological markets in Chiapas and the transformative power of participatory research methods for the study of food systems. While graduate students are used to sitting down and listening (or sitting down and discussing), Mier y Terán surprised us by starting the workshop with a prompt to go outside. He encouraged us to move around and embody our hopes and expectations, instead of simply stating them.

The participatory and interactive activities, as well as our subsequent collective reflections, challenged us to

reconsider our research methods and the way we formulate questions. By offering ideas on how to defy the notions of expertise and scientific knowledge, Mier y Terán provided a glimpse into the possibilities of engaged research and the importance of bridging the knowledge we generate in classrooms with the insights and experiences of the people with whom we conduct research.

During the third event, “Narrating More-Than-Human Politics in Latin America,” Gregg Hetherington, Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Concordia University in Canada, offered a preview of findings from his ongoing research on the “future of facts” in Latin America. His presentation examined the history of science and agribusiness in Paraguay, in particular, the legacies and multiple temporalities of the Green Revolution in Paraguay.

Hetherington discussed how the production of agricultural knowledge implied the participation of scientists, politicians, academics, and private investors. He also drew attention to the impact of current neoliberal agendas on the logic of fact-making in agricultural research in Paraguay. Hetherington then conducted a workshop on speculative writing about more-than-human actors, which features in our introduction to this article.

The Promotion of Collaborative Learning

The most significant outcome of Latin American Natures in Times of Crises was the opportunity to foster a collaborative learning space for graduate students who aim to become environmental social scientists able to deploy critical perspectives in the analysis of environmental issues in Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite ubiquitous public discussion about the climate crisis, specific disciplines, scholars, and academic perspectives are underrepresented in and often excluded from these debates. Such exclusion stems partly from the belief that social sciences and the humanities cannot provide insightful, innovative analyses of environmental struggles, but is also a result of scholars of color being left out of certain debates and spaces.

Our event series addressed those issues by creating a space welcoming to scholars of color, many of them students and early-career scholars who are Latinx (or from the Latin American diaspora) and interested in advancing critical perspectives for the analysis of environmental crises throughout the continent. Latin American Natures in Times of Crises convened graduate students from various departments at UC Berkeley, including Environmental Science, Policy, and Management; Anthropology; the Energy and Resources

Group; and City and Regional Planning. It also attracted students from other UC campuses, such as UCLA, UC Merced, and UC Davis. Additionally, the series drew scholars from other institutions in the Bay Area and California, like Stanford and the University of San Francisco, as well as participants from Latin America and Europe who logged in via Zoom.

Our innovative format of talk+workshop allowed us to accomplish at least four interconnected goals. First, it gave scholars specializing in Latin American Studies a platform to share their cutting-edge research in environmental social sciences and humanities within Latin America and the Caribbean. By highlighting Latin American voices, experiences, and landscapes, the event series has significantly contributed to showcasing current work in critical environmental studies on campus. This exposure likewise provided UC Berkeley students and faculty the opportunity to become familiar with research originating from places such as Paraguay, Costa Rica, and Mexico. Second, the tripartite series offered students and early-career scholars a venue to explore diverse formats for maintaining collective scholarly discussions and experimenting with academic writing on environmental issues, thereby deepening their understanding of the history and composition of various environmental crises

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Lands in Paraguay that have been deforested to make way for cattle ranches.



on the continent. Third, the workshops offered hands-on experiences to graduate students and early-career researchers, who were keen to integrate new concepts and methodologies into their work while studying environmental politics in Latin America and the Caribbean more broadly. Lastly, this format served as a catalyst for initiating collaborations, spawning new projects, and further developing our professional skills.

The working group and the event series served as important formative and experimental spaces for graduate students, particularly for those lacking consolidated scholarly communities within their departments. These students often encounter obstacles such as limited opportunities for funding and publishing or for receiving detailed, constructive feedback on their work. In particular, the availability of funding and administrative infrastructure is vital to support the work of Latin American and Latinx scholars in U.S. academia, as they are often marginalized, underfunded, and underrepresented within their fields or departments.

As various scholars in the social and life sciences have demonstrated, certain inequalities have a substantial impact on the scholarly agendas of Latin American and Latinx graduate students and early-career scholars. These

inequalities arise from a lack of access to technology and funding, the dominance of English as the preferred language for disseminating scientific knowledge, and the imposition of research questions deemed valid and intriguing by scholars in the Global North. They profoundly affect these emerging academics.¹

In this context, the financial and administrative support provided by CLAS, coupled with the initiative shown by the working group organizers, effectively created and nurtured a collective forum for emerging critical environmental scholars. This type of support is crucial in shaping the future of critical environmental studies throughout the region.

Ángela Castillo-Ardila (PhD Anthropology, '23), Sebastián Rubiano-Galvis (PhD Environmental Science, Policy, and Management, '22), Maria Villalpando (PhD [c] Energy and Resources Group), and Andrés Caicedo (PhD [c] Environmental Science, Policy, and Management) are members of the Latin American and Caribbean Sociocultures Working Group. You can learn more about our work at www.lacsociocultures.com.

1. For more about this topic, see Valeria Ramirez-Castañeda, (2020), Disadvantages in preparing and publishing scientific papers caused by the dominance of the English language in science: The case of Colombian researchers in biological sciences. *PLOS ONE* 15(9), e0238372. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238372>.

The talk from the “Transformative Agro-Ecology” workshop, March 2023.



Photo courtesy of the Latin American and Caribbean Sociocultures Working Group.



Photo by Protoplasmakid.

The entrance to the Supreme Court in Mexico City.

LAW

Populism and Challenges to Judicial Independence in Mexico

By Mónica Castillejos-Aragón

Liberalism has been challenged in recent years in Mexico. Under false pretenses of austerity and asceticism, the political establishment is using its electoral mandates to destabilize liberal institutions that are essential pillars of democracy. Not even the judiciary has been immune to such overreaching disruption. On multiple occasions and fronts, the bench has been under attack by political elites, forcing concessions of the judiciary's independence as well as its long-standing process of institutional renovation and progress, as I have described in past research (Castillejos-Aragón, 2013). A look at the political trajectory of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), gives new insight into the enabling conditions for such political intervention in democratic institutions and also informs our understanding of the rise and consolidation of an interbranch populist government in Mexico.

To paraphrase the language of Jan-Werner Müller, AMLO has claimed that he, and only he, represents *el pueblo*, “the people” (Müller, 2016). President López Obrador has successfully promoted a notion of “holism” that fosters the possibility for “the people” to be as one and for all of them to find themselves mirrored in a true representative: Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Such representation relies on the notion that some of “the people” (the poor, the less advantaged, the uneducated, the common people) are certainly the ones who matter the most, because the “others”—the elites, the opposition, whom AMLO calls “the adversaries”—mean nothing and are often deemed corrupt and morally inferior. Since 2000, AMLO has presented himself as a democratic innovator committed to social justice and has promoted the expansion of participation by excluded groups.

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Some backstory: Andrés Manuel López Obrador served as mayor of Mexico City from 2000 to 2005. He also ran for president in 2006, 2012, and 2018. In the 2012 presidential election, López Obrador presented his so-called “austerity plan” for the first time. This controlling instrument has driven his populist political agenda and aims to implement a national policy of republican austerity.

On April 12, 2012, during his second (unsuccessful) presidential campaign, AMLO described his early understanding of an austere government as follows:

Today, *we* are going to insist on the need to apply a republican austerity policy. We have always claimed that there cannot be a rich government with poor people. Under no circumstances—and even less so in a situation of economic stagnation, lack of job opportunities, and impoverishment—should public servants have access to the public budget to obtain high salaries, benefits, and perks, such as private medical care or retirement plans. (López Obrador, 2012, my translation, emphasis added)

Under this plan, all superfluous and unnecessary expenses of high-ranking public officials would be eliminated. AMLO promised to put an end to all the paraphernalia of power. And he advocated for an Aristotelian view of maintaining the Golden Mean (*una justa medianía*) to avoid succumbing to the extreme of excess or descending into deficiency. “Let’s save” and “for the good of all, the poor first,” became emblematic mottos of his everlasting political campaign.

During his 2018 presidential campaign, Andrés Manuel López Obrador appealed to the “transformation” of Mexico—the so-called *Cuarta Transformación* (Fourth Transformation), which would only be possible by implementing drastic policies immediately after taking office. These policies included cutting the salaries of high-level officials, combating poverty and inequality through the implementation of social programs for vulnerable groups, and eradicating corruption and impunity.

AMLO’s enticing rhetoric was embraced and supported by 53 percent of citizens uninterested and uninspired by Mexico’s politics, who finally elected him President of Mexico in a landslide victory on July 1, 2018. Andrés Manuel López Obrador won the presidency on the promise that he would transform Mexico by empowering the underprivileged in a country with deep social and economic inequality. Without a doubt, President López Obrador embodied an egalitarian hope, putting the forgotten at the center of his administration and promising to end oligarchic despotism at last.

The austerity plan nonetheless served as another channel for López Obrador to demonstrate, in plain sight, his contempt for democratic institutions, allegedly corrupt public officials, and elites who only furthered their self-interest. According to him, Mexico’s crisis originated not only in the failure of the neoliberal economic model applied over the past 36 years, but also because of the predominance of public and private corruption. The neoliberal model had turned the government into a committee at the service of a minority dedicated to making lucrative business at the expense of public service. Government corruption, he noted, has led to high levels of inequality, in which a minority became immensely rich and the vast majority of “the people” became impoverished, not due to fate or bad luck, but because of regime of corruption, injustice, and privilege.

Supreme Court justices, federal judges, and magistrates, among other public officials, are all included in AMLO’s catalogue of corrupt elites and self-interested public officials. In 2021, for example, López Obrador inexplicably drew a comparison between Brazil and Mexico to illustrate institutional abuse and governmental privilege and underlined how high-ranking officials in Mexico earned three times more than a high-ranking public official in Brazil.

What the Mexican case does present is the most contemporary example in Latin America of a rising populist government and its general implications regarding the independence of the judiciary. At two specific historical periods, Mexico’s judicial branch has been under similar assault and reduced to a subservient role by political regimes in the 20th and 21st centuries.

During the first period, from 1929 to 2000, Mexico experienced a system in which the government’s executive branch was powerful enough to subordinate the legislative and judicial powers. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party) recognized the separation of powers as a leading tenet defining Mexico’s government structure in theory, yet this principle was far from respected in practice.

A second major assault against the judiciary in Mexico’s contemporary history began in 2018, when the process to strengthen the judicial branch as an institution was disrupted. Since then, the Mexican judiciary has been under attack, and judges are on the frontline. It has been broadly documented how judges at all levels have been threatened by political power grabs, the overwhelming majority of which come from legislators of the leftist political party, Morena, the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement) (Lastiri, 2018; Vizcaíno, 2018; Aristegui Noticias, 2018).



Photo courtesy of the Presidencia de la República Mexicana.

One of the chambers of the Supreme Court in Mexico.

And the path of such judicial assault? Immediately after the 2018 presidential election, President López Obrador announced the implementation of his austerity plan and unveiled a hostile campaign against the legitimacy of Mexico's democratic institutions with special emphasis on the judicial branch. Under the alleged implementation of his austerity plan, the López Obrador administration has attempted to eliminate various tiers of the judiciary to advance his populist agenda. A series of executive and legislative action have placed obstacles for judges in the performance of their constitutional mandates. The López Obrador administration has used the state apparatus and media campaigns to tarnish the judiciary's institutional legitimacy and reputation *vis-à-vis* civil society. Members of AMLO's political party have employed dangerous generalizations and used isolated cases of corruption to discredit the entire judiciary.

Whereas the constitutional reform primarily served as a mechanism to set constraints against the Supreme Court justices during the PRI's authoritarian regime, Mexico's new form of governance has implemented more sophisticated forms of pressure, resulting in the judiciary's alignment with the presidential ideology and the adoption of the new populist government's canons. Over the past five years, the López Obrador administration has methodically constructed a narrative that sets the judiciary as part of the corrupt officials who have drained the country's public resources. This narrative has been followed by several blunt actions against Mexican judges (El Financiero, 2022).

As soon as he took office as President of Mexico, AMLO publicly sought to constrain the judicial branch and showed early signs of his willingness to levy political threats and potentially drastic actions against the judiciary that had been announced in past presidential campaigns (Beauregard, 2018). First, he advocated the replacement of the Supreme Court with a Constitutional Tribunal. This change would reduce the function of the former to a mere court of cassation (or appeals), which would remove the court's power of judicial review and dismantle Mexico's system of checks and balances. This constitutional change would set the stage for the president to remove the current bench and appoint judges sympathetic to his political ideology (Reporte Índigo, 2018). Second, he has recommended dismantling the Federal Judicial Council, an instance of the federal judicial power created under the 1994 judicial reform to oversee judicial administration and foster judges' independence (Boletín.org, 2018). Finally, he supports the establishment of a judicial career system with the purpose of politically leveraging the selection process of aspiring district judges or federal magistrates.

President López Obrador's transformative discourse, paired with his austerity policies, have instigated a blatant confrontation with members of the judiciary. The judicial branch became his favorite example of governmental corruption and abuse of public resources and aimed to place this institution under the control of the ruling majority. Such political interference has resulted in the erosion of the independence of justice in Mexico.

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The AMLO administration has also fostered a series of conditions that have facilitated the decline of the judicial branch. They include recent judicial appointments, political pressure to compromise the judicial guarantee against salary cuts, and use of state mechanisms to investigate and intimidate officials with alleged or fabricated corruption charges. Political pressure is being levied to dismantle institutions created as part of Mexico's longstanding democratic transition in the mid-1990s, including the creation of the Judicial Council, the Federal Electoral Tribunal, and the National Electoral Institute. At the same time, Morena has backed a series of legal and constitutional reforms targeting the judicial branch, among them the blatant violation of the Mexican Constitution to extend the mandate of the Chief Justice. All these conditions have enabled political elites to successfully constrain the judiciary's operation and counteract its institutional position.

Democracy and the rule of law depends on fair and independent courts to protect citizens against abuse of power, provide checks and balances, and administer justice without regard to outside pressures. The existence of a judicial branch that is separate from the other branches of government is a *sine qua non* condition in democratic countries. According to the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, "the judiciary shall decide matters before them impartially, on the basis of facts and in accordance with the law, without any restrictions, improper influences, inducements, pressures, threats, or interferences, direct or indirect, from any quarter or for any reason" (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 1985).

In January 2023, the Supreme Court justices elected the first female Chief Justice since 1824. Chief Justice Norma Piña Hernández has called upon political elites to respect the independence of the judiciary. In her first public engagement with AMLO, she noted that "judicial independence is not a privilege of judges; it is the principle that guarantees an adequate administration of justice to make effective the freedoms and equality of Mexicans" (Ferri, 2023).

However, the systematic political attacks discussed above have not ceased, indeed, they have intensified. Political threats against members of the judiciary have triggered an unprecedented risk to their personal integrity. In recent days, AMLO's political militants have

blocked the main entrance of the Supreme Court building and are calling for justices to resign in response to the latest judicial opinion that invalidated AMLO's so-called Plan B, which aimed to dismantle another critical democratic institution responsible for overseeing Mexico's electoral processes: the National Electoral Institute.

Overall, the Mexican case illustrates how the process of institutional strengthening and transformation of the judiciary has been interrupted since 2018 through the gradual judicial capitulation of Mexican judges to political pressure. Mexico's ongoing politics offer a unique account of the political process and enabling conditions under which a new form of political interference has taken place with regard to the Mexican judiciary and provide living examples of the challenges populism poses to constitutional democracy and the rule of law.

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References for this article are online at clas.berkeley.edu.

Mónica Castillejos-Aragón.



Photo courtesy of Mónica Castillejos-Aragón.

CLAS: By the Numbers

2022–2023

EVENTS

45 Total number of events

Languages represented in our events: Ayoreo, Guaraní, Juma, Mam, Nahuatl, Portuguese, Quechua, Spanish, Triqui, Wixárika, Yaqui, and Yucatec.

28 Faculty and student events

Countries represented: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

STUDENT GRANT SUPPORT

31 Student grant recipients

18 Academic departments

9 Countries hosted research projects

COURSES ORGANIZED

6 Nahuatl Language Courses shared with the University of Utah and IDIEZ

3 Mam Language & Culture Workshop Series shared with Laney Community College and Unión Maya

1 Special Seminar With CLAS Visiting Writer Dani Zelko shared with the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

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