

Crisis, Conflict, Conjuncture:
Confronting the Discrepant Raza Archive—Notes Towards a Chicana
Marxist Praxis

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Preface:

Concientización is a Lifelong Journey of *Autocrítica*

When I attended my first National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Conference in Boulder, Colorado in 1988 as a 23-year-old undergraduate student, I could never have imagined I would be granted the honor of presenting on a plenary session 33 years later. At that time, I had just embarked on a long (and still ongoing) journey of transformation from a mystified Chicano who earlier had planned to become a US Army airborne infantry officer, into a cultural nationalist, then a more Marxist revolutionary nationalist. From my materialist ChicanIndio positionality, I eventually gravitated towards communism—a different Red Road, as it were—that involves an awareness that the process of *concientización*—or political awakening—must be an ongoing life-long enterprise that should never end. Thanks to NACCS, my growth and evolutions continue to this day, and are informed by NACCS feministas, Zapatistas, anarquistas, and the small but strong contingent of Raza comunistas who converge and dialogue at NACCS conferences in addition to many other venues. I am grateful to all of them for including me in this long march of discovery and transformation.

That is to say that I evolved, and continue to evolve, within NACCS as the organization itself evolved and continues to evolve. I witnessed and participated in many important moments in NACCS that mark this growth. I recall, for instance, when compañera Julia Curry productively paused the business meeting at one NACCS conference to recognize a Chicana undergraduate student whose campus contingent rejected her request to support the name change to the “National Association for *Chicana* and Chicano Studies.” The student came on

stage to report what had happened, and challenged the organization to confront itself. We did, and the organization name changed from the “National Association for Chicano Studies” to the “National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies.” More work to address heteropatriarchy remained (and still remains) to be done, but this was an important moment in this ongoing process of autocrítica, that is, the constant self-assessment and critique necessary for true concientización to occur and become kinetic political action. This episode modeled productive interventions into toxic masculinities that so many of us inherit.

Unfortunately, I also witnessed very many Raza faculty who never got involved in NACCS, or left the organization once their careers became more prominent. Ironically, they never supported, or fled, NACCS despite the fact some likely would not have had academic careers without this insurgent and ground-breaking organization. After all, it was NACCS and NACCS scholar-activists who helped institutionalize the field while simultaneously grounding its ethos beyond universities. This mostly heteropatriarchal male elitist Brown-flight, as I call it, coincided with the moment NACCS started dismantling its heteropatriarchal roots to embrace LGBTQ+ Raza. Refreshingly, I also saw veteranos like Rodolfo Acuña continue to be involved in NACCS in support of this opening and still evolving organization that has been kept going strong and creating new visions through leadership from Chicana lesbian activist scholars. There are many more important moments I have had the honor to witness, and play a small part in supporting as an ally. They all reveal how NACCS continues to evolve just as we must continue to evolve if we are to be true revolutionaries and not just simple advocates for “Raza empowerment” though agendas that claim to be decolonial and anti-capitalist but which too often merely seek Raza integration into the capitalist empire and related hierarchal practices that masquerade as “tradition,” “resistance,” “radical,” and “decolonial praxis.” N’mbre, shaddup, I cannot count the number of Raza veteranas and veteranos I have encountered who have reputations for being “radical” but who in practice turned out to be hierarchical, egocentric, exploitative, and outright reactionary. Some even insist on being called by the hierarchical terms “maestra” and “maestro” instead of the more egalitarian “compañera,” “compañero,” and “compañerx.” Too many of them continue to get away with hiding retrograde politics without being challenged.

Accordingly, I believe being a NACCS scholar and ally to people-in-struggle means offering important critiques, even when they are unpopular or unwanted. I thus want to follow the lead of the first major corrective of our field by Chicana feminist scholars from the 1980s and 1990s (though these interventions certainly began much earlier with a different gallery of foremothers). I specifically want to address an unintended consequence of our field's success: how our promotion of awareness about the long and diverse legacy of Raza resistance to oppressions may have inadvertently occluded the equally long and large legacy of Raza individualist opportunists, conservatives, right wingers, and even fascists. That is, I want to call our attention to what might be called a Raza discrepant archive, and the need for contrapuntal analysis, that is, reading against the grain of this archive. This archive makes almost no sense within some of our otherwise brilliant and productive Chicanx Studies paradigms and theories of praxis predicated upon more overtly resistant subjectivities and related primary materials and phenomena. Indeed, it is frequently assumed that terms such as "Latinx," "Chicanx," "Raza," and others automatically and unambiguously signal resistance and opposition to capitalism and imperialism. They do not. The insistence that Raza, and Raza Studies, are inherently counterhegemonic not only effaces real objective and subjective realities, but also makes us complicit in this mystification, ultimately rendering Raza Studies scholars as more conservative than we sometimes realize.

Chicanologa/os and the Degeneration of Raza Studies:

Ironically, despite some persistent beliefs about Raza as inherently oppositional to capitalism and imperialism, our field has been co-opted into a safe multiculturalism within which Chicanx and Latinx millionaires are accepted as legitimate as Latinx generals and the growing mainstream Latinx political caste. More, the large and ever-growing cadre of tenured Raza professors—of which I am one—is sometimes seen as evidence of the success of the Chicana/o Movement, rather than being part of the middle class that has effectively become a stabilizing intermediary cadre of reformers that preempts real revolutionary consciousness raising, mobilizations, and interventions. I realize these statements are generalizations and quite polemical, especially since many (though certainly not all) NACCS scholars remain grounded in grassroots activism. But it is a fact that the Latinx middle and upper classes are growing while the Raza underclass remains vast, growing even larger, and still grounded in profound precarity. And

worse, some—and far too many—Raza Studies Departments, Centers, Programs, and Institutes have started to model an ideological degeneration that confirms our field needs to continue the ongoing work of meta-critique, that is, the critique of our very critical enterprise and praxis.

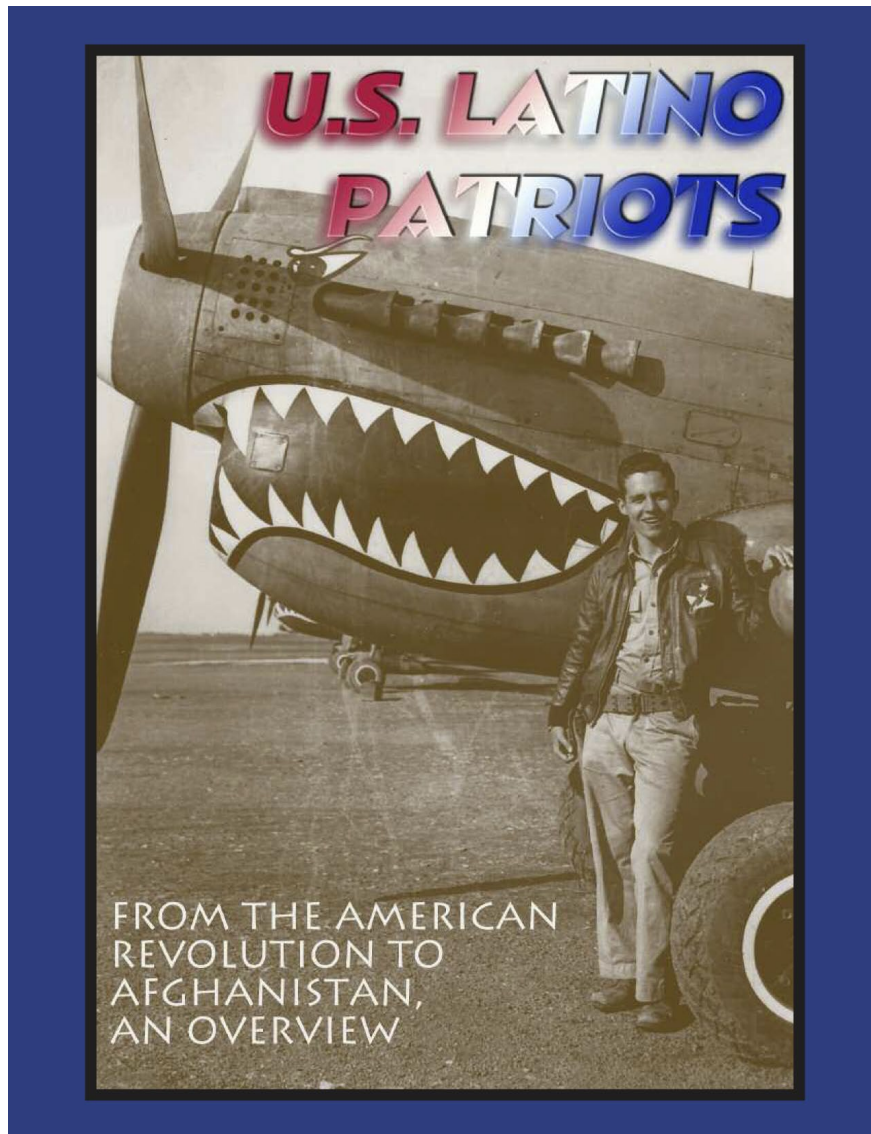


Figure 1. *US Latino Patriots: From the American Revolution to Afghanistan, An Overview*, by Refugio I. Rochín, Lionel Fernandez, and José Alonso Oliveros (Julian Samora Center at Michigan State University, 2005).

Unfortunately, there is far too much evidence to draw upon to illustrate our field's degeneration. The monograph, *US Latino Patriots: From the American Revolution to Afghanistan, An Overview*, published by the Julian Samora Center at Michigan State University in 2005, is illustrative of ideological contradictions that remain under-examined (see Figure 1). This uncritical celebration of Raza complicity in US settler colonialism and imperialism is not uncommon. By featuring this publication as evidence of our field's ideological and methodological degeneration, I am not suggesting that we should not study Raza soldiering. On the contrary; this is a field of great interest to me as well. But in the 21st century we should not still be celebrating our complicities—complex as they are—in US imperialism, preceding settler colonialism, and outright genocide. I should add that our field's continued celebration of the Soldado Razo is challenged through very important counterpoints by Jorge Mariscal, Lorena Oropeza, Belinda Rincon, Ariana Vigil, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, and many more NACCS scholars. But our field continues to ground many of its salient paradigms—the generational progress narrative, for instance—in the reification of this archetypal male warrior hero from the WWII era. Ironically, attempts to “revise” this archetype by recovering *Soldada* Razo figures such as the Soldadera and various analogues have more often than not served to reify Raza containment within the empire in the guise of marking our resistance to it. I realize we are talking about our family members, and this demands respectful treatment and an awareness that *concientización* sometimes is a privilege of a college education that many of our gente will never access, particularly those who are caught in the de facto economic draft and hypermasculinist socialization and mystification that leads them into barrio warfare, prison, and the military. But we have a responsibility to be thorough in our understanding of soldiering, citizenship, and power. I believe our field largely has failed in this *deber*. Indeed, except for the aforementioned scholars, the vast majority extant research on Raza soldiering continues to lionize Raza male, and now female as well as LGBTQI+ soldiering, as counterhegemonic agency despite a wide and complex ideological range. N'mbre, shaddup, lo estamos cagando.



Figure 2. George P. Bush at the Latino Leadership Award Ceremony, Center for Mexican American Studies and Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies, University of Texas at Austin, March 30, 2015.

As if our reification of Raza warrior heroes, imperialists, and even fascists like General Ricardo Sánchez—the commanding US Army officer during the Abu Ghraib prisoner torture episode—were not bad enough, Raza Studies centers have done worse. The Center for Mexican American Studies and Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies (MALS) at the University of Texas at Austin bestowed their inaugural 2015 Latino Leadership Award to George P. Bush, the son of a Mexican mother and white father, Jeb Bush, the former governor of Florida (see Figure 2). He also is the grandson and nephew to two U.S. Presidents—George H. Bush and George W. Bush—both staunch neo-liberals, anti-communists, and instigators of U.S. imperialist wars that led to the Abu Ghraib Prison horror among other atrocities that approach genocide. George P. Bush, a US Naval Reserve Officer deployed during the War on Terror, has overtly defended and even promoted the imperialist politics of his family members, and has even enacted them. Worse, he is now a candidate for Texas Attorney General who promises to “finish the work Donald Trump started,”

including extension of the border wall and increased Border Patrol funding, all of which will lead to more deaths of Raza.



Figure 3. The Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, circa 2020.

It gets worse. In 2020, the Luís Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature, awarded annually by the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB), was bestowed upon Francisco Cantú, a former Border Patrol Officer who authored a memoir, *The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches from the Border*. (See Figures 3 and 4.) This award was created in 2003 and is named after the late Chicano literary scholar Luís Leal, who helped create the field of Chicano literary studies.

The 2020 Leal Award is so profoundly dissonant with the history and spirit of Chicana Studies that it actually constitutes a violence. This is especially so for undocumented students at UCSB, who could not miss posters throughout campus announcing a former Migra was arriving to receive an award by the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department for writing about being a Migra officer. I should add that this is my current institution and my complaints and efforts to halt this pendejada were ignored: in fact, the flier announcing this event lists eleven co-sponsors, including the current Luís Leal Chair in Chicana and Chicano Studies, who is a recipient of the NACCS Scholar Award! As mi primo Freddie Porras, a barrio educator, grassroots activists, and decades-long member of NACCS would say, “¡¿Qué chingaos?!”

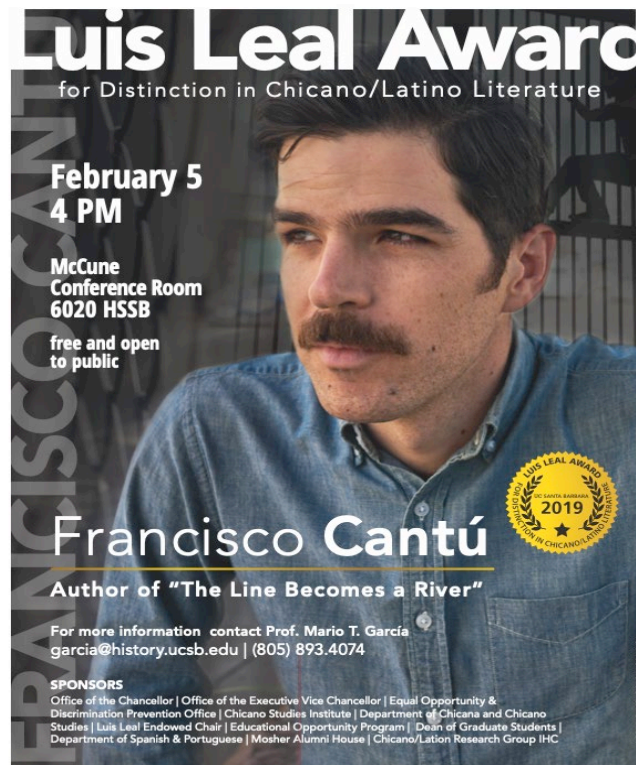


Figure 4. Poster for the University of California Santa Barbara Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies 2020 Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature Award Ceremony.

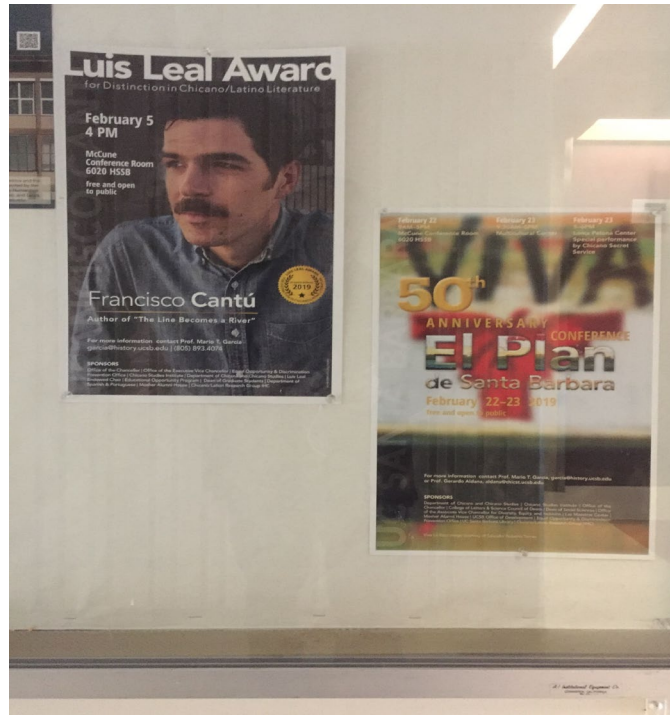


Figure 5. Posters for the Luís Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature & 50th Anniversary of El Plan De Santa Barbara, at the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara. February 5 & February 22, 2020.

Everyone at NACCS knows that UCSB is the site where El Plan de Santa Barbara was drafted. Ironically, the 50th anniversary commemoration of this epochal document that led to the creation of Chicana/o/x Studies was held in the same department just two weeks after the Migra Officer award ceremony. The posters of both events remained posted—side by side—in the department’s display box for a full year! (See Figure 5.) Sometimes all you can say is “¡Qué chingaos!”

I can go on about other instances, such as the fact that a former director of two Raza studies centers was a staunch member of the Republican Party, which provided funding for Raza Studies events. In fact, he is not the only Raza Republican involved in Chicanx and Latinx Studies! Y para no acabar de chingar, when I was a graduate student at Stanford University, the undergraduate members of MEChA changed their constitution to explicitly include Republicans! I am not saying we should not address or exclude such figures from the field. On the

contrary, as I noted from the start, I think we need to recover and assess them critically through properly historicized and contextualized analysis. Except for two decades of virulent criticism of Richard Rodriguez's anti-bilingual política and Eurocentric epistemology in the 1980s and 1990s, the field has not thoroughly attended to Raza conservatives, and much less the more overtly right-wing Raza. And we also have failed to assess and intervene into the ideological degeneration of our field that sometimes includes Raza conservatives among its ranks, and which also involves the celebration of Raza reactionaries! It is one thing to study this phenomenon; but it is another thing to weave them into the paradigm driving the field if we still want to claim that the field is oppositional to capitalism and imperialism.

Towards a Meta-Critique of Raza Studies:

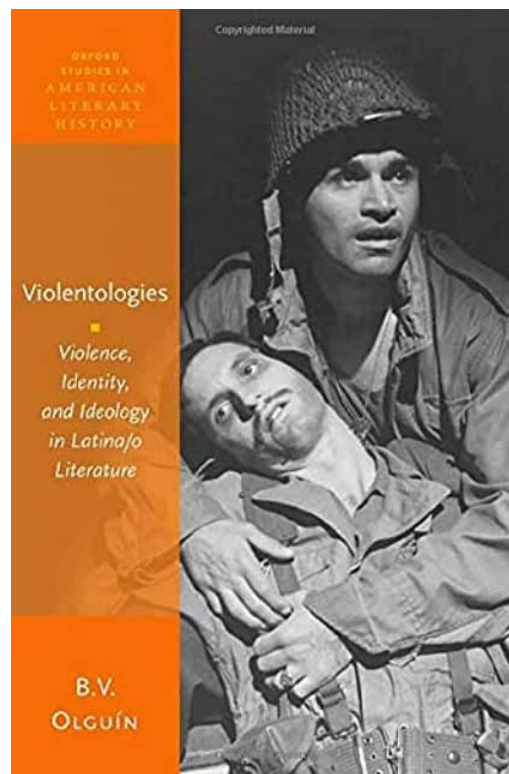


Figure 6. *Violentologies: Violence, Identity, and Ideology in Latina/o Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2021)

Despite all these pendejadas, there refreshingly is great amount of activist-based scholarship from NACCS scholars that points the way towards a new synthesis. I am inspired by my co-panelists, and especially our moderator Roberto Hernández, and by many more. To close, I would like to note a bit about the small intervention I am trying to make in my new book—*Violentologies: Violence, Identity, and Ideology in Latina/o Literature*, just released by Oxford University Press (see Figure 6). The operative term in this book—violentologies—is a neologism formed by the fusion of violence, ontology, and epistemology. It thus participates in ongoing dialogues about the multiple violences that have shaped, and continue to shape, Raza history, culture, identity, and politics. Pursuant to this goal I have tried to look at these phenomena through a different lens than purely identity or even class politics. Specifically, I seek to map the ways Raza are interpellated through various forms of violence into new subjects—I use the term Supra-Latinx to signal that these new formations go through, but frequently far beyond, our conventional understanding of Chicanidad and Latinidad. This enables me to free Raza subjects from our overdetermined renderings. I ultimately argue that these nuanced, and sometimes new supra-Latinx—and sometimes post-Latinx—subjects demand a paradigm shift that more accurately accounts for the myriad ways we navigate power. Here are a few examples of the discrepant Raza archive that are demanding a radical re-orientation of Raza Studies towards a meta-critical praxis.

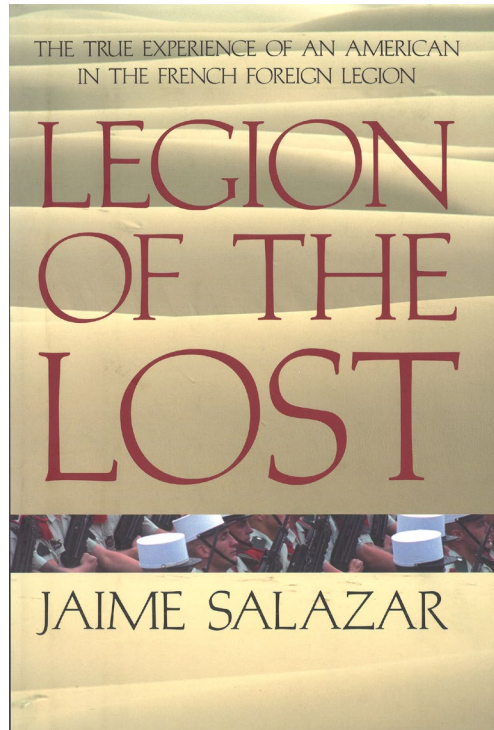


Figure 7. Cover from the 2005 edition of *Legion of the Lost* (Dutton Caliber).



Figure 8. Jaime Salazar, Chicano Volunteer in the French Foreign Legion, Paris, France 1999.

I open the book with a discussion of a Chicano volunteer in the French Foreign Legion, Jaime Salazar (see Figures 7 and 8). Through interviews and readings of his memoir in relation to other Raza who fought in France in WWI and WWII—particularly my family members—I note how this supra-Chicano Soldado Razo both critiques and rejects the US. Yet, he also serves in a counter-imperialist military—the French Foreign Legion no less, which is a French unit composed of colonial subjects and subalterns from throughout the world. This makes his critique of US imperialism merely a counter-imperialism, albeit quite complex in ways as I discuss in my book.

Jaime Salazar is not alone in modeling the intertwining of cultural nationalism with imperialisms. For instance, I also examine Latinx Muslims, with close explications of Chicana and Boricua Muslim Hip Hop artists who variously critique US empire, albeit through ideologically inchoate poetics. For instance, Chicano Abu Nurah, originally David Chavez from Pico Rivera in Los Angeles, makes allusions to Islamic socialism, but quickly segues into a counter-imperialism through invocations of the restoration of a global Muslim Caliphate.

The Boricua duo that make up Mujahedeen Team—Hamza and Suleiman Perez—do something similar while simultaneously intertwining their advocacy for Puerto Rican independence from the US. They are famous for performing onstage with a flaming machete, in an allusion to the Macheteros, or Boricua National Liberation Army.

I must note that Raza Muslims run a huge ideological gamut, which I examine, such as activists and spoken word artists Robert Farid Karimi, of Iranian and Guatemalan heritage, and Mark Gonzales, of Tunisian and Mexican heritage, both of whom are born and raised in the US, but use a completely new nomenclature and epistemology than we are accustomed to in Aztlán.

The discrepant archive includes myriad Raza imperialist and even fascists soldiers and paramilitary officers, including in the CIA. I recover this cadre of Raza to explicate how their cultural nationalist discourses are fully allied with US imperialism. In many instances, such as the work of former CIA officer Antonio Burciaga, their work both segues with leftist Raza, and is even centered as quintessentially Raza. This alone should demand that we reassess the ideological underpinnings of our many claims to oppositional status as Chicana gente.

My book also examines the works of Chicana and broader Latinx neo-orientalists travelers throughout the Muslim world. This includes dozens of books that include Latina feminist orientalists such as Ana Menendez and Stephanie

Elizondo Greist, in addition to Chicano exoticist Orientalist writings by Rudolfo Anaya, J. Malcolm Garcia, and many more.

Significantly, very many more case studies introduce profound new syntheses that are not quite decolonial but still outside the US, Aztlán, and even the Americas, for which a new nomenclature is required. I spend time discussing ChicaNisei, ChiKorean, LatinAsian, and myriad LatIndia/o subjects, such as Boricua Taíno Lakota AfroLatIndia/o Two-Spirit performer Felipe Rose of the famous band, The Village People.

The list of neologistic nominatives is much longer and, I believe, necessary for understanding the ideologically inchoate spectacles I discussed earlier in my reference to some of the things happening in Chicax Studies Departments and Centers. But more importantly, we need to find new ways of accounting for subjects who perform, inhabit, embody, and simply are Chicax and Latinx in so many different ways—individually and ideologically—than the ways we have been doing in our field. The X in Chicax is a great place to start. But I think we need more. Thank you.