

“Indigenous Knowledge for Resistance”: Lecciones from Our Past

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Washington State University sits on the lands of the Nimiipuu and Palus peoples – land only recently taken from these first nations. With the first treaty, negotiated at Walla Walla, just miles from where I sit and edit our proceedings, tribal leaders were able to retain approximately 7.5 million acres of their original lands. Yet, as in so many other histories of first nations, once Euro-American settlers found gold they encroached on reservation lands; the response of the U.S. government was to negate the treaty it had made with the Nimiipuu and Palus and insist on taking yet more land. The Treaty of 1863 reduced tribal lands to approximately 750,000 acres.¹ Also known as the *Theft Treaty*, the 1863 “treaty” was rejected by many people, including Husishusis Kate, a spiritual leader of the Palus. Years of battles and U.S. genocidal practices followed. As a result, Washington State University sits on the lands of the Nimiipuu and Palus peoples.²

I recount this brief history here because it calls to mind some of the critical contradictions within which many of us work: committed to decolonial pedagogies, we often labor in spaces created through violent colonial projects. Within this context how do we create, fuel, sustain and insist on pedagogies that are, in fact, decolonial and life-giving – that challenge the very state that our institutions were built to sustain and the systems that those institutions are built to reproduce? As Chicax scholars, how do we build relationships with the first nations of the land where we work, especially if we are not of those nations? These are not new questions, but questions that our communities, including Chicax academics and activists, have been asking for generations. In 2019, at our national conference, our chair-elect brought us back to reflect on these critical issues once again.

Dr. Karleen Pendleton Jiménez’ welcome letter called us to dialogue and to question our work, activism, scholarship, and relationships. Holding a

conference themed “Indigenous Knowledge for Resistance, Love, and Land,” she reminded us, was/is a bold call to accountability. Thus she opened her letter with questions directed to all of us who engage in scholarship and activism with, from, through and/or in Chicana/x Studies:

What is your relationship to Indigeneity? Where and how have you learned? How has Chicana/o/x Studies excluded or encouraged this learning? How do you honour Indigenous knowledge in yourself, your classrooms of university students, with K-12 children and youth, and with community learners and activists?

Such questions have deep roots in our field and our communities because of our complex histories as mestiza/o and Indigenous scholars working in coalition with First Nation communities, at times as members of those same communities, at times not. They also have deep roots the critical work of coalition that made the work that we do in our home institutions possible.

On many of our campuses it was working in coalition with activists from Black, Indigenous, and Asian communities that the generation of the liberation movements insisted on a new curriculum of, by and for our communities.³ In 1969 Ethnic Studies programs were founded at San Francisco State University and at the University of California, Berkeley though the activism and coalitions of students, staff and faculty committed to diverse liberation movements.⁴ At my alma mater, San Francisco State University, the program came at a high price; faculty were fired for participating in the strike, not all were rehired. Chicano studies was the result of Chicano scholars and activists coming together in spaces such as University of California, and Washington State University, and it was the result of the coalitions fighting for resources on our campuses.⁵ Similar coalitions among Chicana women and other women of color feminists would give rise to the founding of Kitchen Table Press and the foundational *This Bridge Called My Back*.

The National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies was founded in this context, first as the National Caucus of Chicano Social Scientists (1973) but by 1976 the National Association for Chicano Studies.⁶ From its inception the founders insisted our scholarship be relevant and accountable to our communities.⁷ Three decades later scholar activists including Steve Casanova, Patrisia Gonzales, and Roberto Rodríguez founded the Indigenous caucus of NACCS.⁸

The caucus continues to strive to:

Endorse the development of critical, creative, ethical, and intuitive thinking, skills, and actions; Promote and protect Indigenous Peoples' sovereignty, languages, lands, cultures, resources, sexualities, and rights; Work towards the creation of an effective and pro-Indigenous United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; Provide support, resources, and advocacy for Indigenous scholars working within the university; Advance liberatory teaching, research, service, and relations; and Disseminate statements and positions on local, national, and global events that affect Indigenous Peoples.⁹

In the twenty-first century, as across Turtle Island and beyond, First Nations continue to rebuild amid a socio-political context of national backlash, the efforts of the caucus remain critical to the well-being of NACCS and our larger world communities.

Today, even as we struggle within a world of backlash—where white nationalism is on the rise not only in U.S. but in Russia, Germany, and England it is more critical than ever that we remember the lessons of the liberation movements.¹⁰ Our survival and flourishing requires that we move forward with pride in our home communities, as in coalition with other communities and nations committed to decolonial activism and liberated futures, we engage “Indigenous Knowledge for Resistance, Love, and Land.”

During the liberation movements of the 1960s-70s Indigenous, African American, Asian and Chicanx peoples, often working in coalition, insisted on dialogues to address similar challenges to the ones which we face today. In addressing those challenges our communities took note of and, at times articulated some of the complex relationships and ways in which our communities at times overlap, and weave together, especially Chicanx and Indigenous communities. Here the life of raulsalinas comes to mind, an activist whose legacy was the focus of Louis Mendoza’s “Memoir of Un Ser Humano,” published in last year’s proceedings, but also the work of Santiago Vidales, featured in part two of this volume.¹¹ Salinas’s commitment to Pinto justice, including freeing political prisoners Leonard Peltier and Mumia Abu Jamal, and his activism within the American Indian Movement highlighted the manner in which so many of our communities are connected.¹²

This weaving, as well as the questions of Dr. Pendleton Jiménez also call to mind the work of strong Indigenous women in NACCS, women such as Dr. Inés M. Talamantez, Mescalero Apache, who, in her scholarship and in our meetings, consistently called on all of us to reject colonial and patriarchal mind-sets and institutions.¹³ It was Dr. Talamantez, who, when Dr. Margo Tamez, Lipan Apache, received the Antonia I. Castañeda Award, made sure we honored protocol. In this her year of passing as we honor her memory, we also remember her role in building the field of Native American religious studies, her fierce scholar-activism, engagement with the Indigenous caucus, and commitment to calling us all to activism, accountability, and life.

Many NACCS members will remember the powerful work Dr. Talamantez contributed to *Fleshing the Spirit*—a volume critical to scholars of religion and spirituality, and to anyone committed to wholeness. Through their ongoing conversations with other mujeres about Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous spirituality Elisa Facio and Irené Lara conceived of and developed this first anthology of Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women’s spiritualities. In its opening pages Dr. Talamantez reminded us:

The ancestors knew we were coming
 They left work for us
 Now we carry their wisdom forward.
 Know who you are, *sabe quien eres*
 Know your land, *conoce tu tierra*
 Learn your language, *aprende tu idioma*¹⁴

The work presented at NACCS XLVI was beautifully intersectional in its response to Dr. Pendleton Jiménez’ call, a call that reminded and reminds us to *Know who we are, Know our land, Learn our language*. In this volume we have a sampling of that work, divided into three sections: Flourishing of the Nations, Community Building/Community Coalition, and Sitio y Lengua. The papers approach the conference theme from different angles whether focusing on the power of community education, strategies for rebuilding nations that continue to confront settler colonial violence, or using our words and stories to strengthen our communities through the deployment of culture. Thus, this year, as in years past, our scholarship, as required by our field, remains rooted in the goal of liberation, grounded in the work of scholar activists who came before us.

Part one: Flourishing of the Nations, opens with the welcome address of our then, Chair-elect (now Chairs) referenced in this Introduction. It is followed by the powerful work of Marisol Archuleta of the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), reminding us that in New Mexico, her homeland, “Colonization has never truly won ... though we are familiar with the taste.” With her strong voice she notes:

Through resistance and resilience, we’ve saved the seeds of our sacred culture, the seeds of our languages, and the seeds of our foods. I seek out the seeds of my history to plant in the hearts of my daughters, through reclaiming the words, recipes and traditions our colonizers were never able to erase.

She reminds us of the work of SWOP as it plants seeds and nurtures seeds and fights for justice. Similarly, Adrian Chavana writes of community action and struggle. Chavana’s focus is nation rebuilding –noting the false narrative of extinction, created by the nation state, that erased the continuing history of Coahuiltecan Mission Indians, the state recognition of the Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan Nation, and the role of peyote in the nation’s continued resurgence.

Part Two, Community Building/Community Coalition holds examples of the multiple and varied ways that we continue to work for the empowerment of our multiple communities. Yesenia Olmos, in “A Practicing Doula Testimonio,” writes of her journey becoming a doula, of mentorship, heritage and a commitment to healthy birthing and “respect for all.” Rooted in the rich tradition of testimonio, her paper connects past to present and holds justice at its core. Similarly, Alexandra Arraiz Matute and Nira Elgueta, in “Cuentos del Sur,” tell of their work with immigrant women in Canada and their efforts to build immigrant and Indigenous solidarity on Turtle Island. They note the contradictions in Canada's Reconciliation Commission, and its 94 Calls to Action which public institutions oftentimes fail to meet. Their cuento maps the difficult yet critical work of *concientización* and the coalitional work that made/makes their work possible. It calls to mind the work of Gloria E. Anzaldúa who reminded us that we are *nos/otras*, bridged people, working in alliance. Elisa Facio, in one of her last published works too built on this concept reminding us:

Nostotras, the Spanish word for the feminine us, indicates a collectivity, a type of group identity of consciousness. Joining together *nos* and *otras* holds the promise of healing; we contain

others, others contain us. However, *nos/otras* does not represent sameness, as the differences among us still exist. These two concepts function dialogically, generating previously unrecognized commonalities and connections.¹⁵

Finally, Francisco Villegas and E. Munoz, a team of scholars from Kalamazoo College in Michigan analyze the discourses surrounding the fight for county IDs in Kalamazoo. Like Dr. Pendleton Jiménez, they map and trouble language that creates us/them binaries and discourses of deservingness, even on the part of allies. The goal, then, was/is to have both language and physical forms of identification marking “all people as members of the same community.”

Part three is titled *sitio y lengua*, in honor of the call of Emma Pérez, now three decades old, to claim space and language and to acknowledge the manner in which language theft robs us of our histories. This section is comprised of four critical essays, each using language to claim, reclaim and create spaces of *concientización*, power, and action.¹⁶ Ismael Mondragón, in “The Devil at the Gay Bar,” revisits the New Mexico tradition of *cuentos*. How do we keep this critical tradition alive and vibrant today? Answering his own question he revisits the *cuento* of “Devil at the Dance Hall” this time with a queer lens. His story, rich in tradition and imagery, holds the power to pull us in and teach us lessons of honesty and integrity. C. “Martin” Vélez Salas in “Reflexiones nepantleras profesionales,” engages the Anzaldúan tool of *autohistoria* to argue for the power of language in relation to community, the nation-state, and the possibility of coalition. Applying the critical lessons he learned growing up in Peru, with multiple dialects of Spanish (and English and Quechua) he argues that language departments and the university in general must learn to build on the language skills of Chicanx and Latinx students from throughout the Americas if we are to succeed in creating alliances among ourselves and between ourselves and larger justice projects. Equally important, if we want to remain relevant as places of learning to the new generations of students who now fill our classrooms, we must expand our lexicon and our pedagogy. In relation Santiago Vidales’ “Hemispheric Poetics” reminds us of the relevance of two critical writers to today’s students. Through a close reading of the work of Raúl Salinas and César Vallejo he is able to demonstrate the convergence of liberatory politics in the work of Salinas, a Chicanx poet, and Vallejo, the Peruvian writer. Vidales’ work, like so much foundational work in Chicanx studies, takes a hemispheric approach to our histories and political struggles. Vidales argues that

Cultures are always already informing one another. It is thus the critic's responsibility to create scholarly approaches that can account for the multiplicity of ways that the people in our hemisphere have produced politically conscious art grounded in their lived experiences.

Finally, Magaly Odoñez, in "Relationships with Cannabis," engages a "Chicana and Indigenous feminist theory to imagine a decolonial politics as it concerns cannabis potentiality for tribal sovereignty." Vélez Salas, Vidales and Ordoñez call us, through the power of language and coalition, to connection and thus bring us full circle. Like Marisol Archuleta of the Southwest Organizing Project, they remind us of the importance of knowing our roots and building from those roots to action; they remind us *conoce quien eres* and they remind us *conoce tu tierra*. They remind us to plant new seeds for the generations to come. The papers presented at NACCS 2019 inspired me to be a better scholar, a relevant scholar, a scholar-activist committed to continuing the work of the generations who came before me. It is my hope that they will also inspire you.

The years ahead of us, as our multiple and diverse communities and nations build and challenge colonial legacies, will bring challenges which we will be able to meet if we continue to do the difficult work of coalition, listening, and learning. Thus I close these introductory notes with words, once again from Karleen Pendleton Jiménez:

How do we know when our work involves deep and respectful teaching and learning? How can we build and maintain good relations between Chicana/o/x and Indigenous communities? How can we avoid the traps of cultural appropriation? How do we incorporate Indigenous knowledge into our conceptions of ethical research? How might Chicanas/os/xs acknowledged Indigenous land claims, when our own relationships with land have been fraught or severed for generations?

Solidariamente,
Linda Heidenreich, Washington State University
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Notes:

¹ Nez Perce Tribe, History. <https://www.nezperce.org/about/history/>. Accessed January 21, 2020; James Darcy, "The Continuing Impact of Manifest Destiny in a Small Town," *Wicazo Sa Review* 14 no. 1 (1999): 148-50.

² Clifford E. Trafzer, "The Palous in Eekish Pah," *American Indian Quarterly* 9 no. 2 (Spring 1985): 169-82.

³ Catherine S. Ramírez, "Learning and Unlearning from Ethnic Studies," *American Quarterly* 66 no. 4 (December 2014): 1059; Dennis Lopez, "Cultivating Aztlán: Chicano (Counter)Cultural Politics and the Postwar American University," *American Studies* 58 no. 1 (2019): 74, 87-88. Lopez notes that with the rise of reactionary politics in the early twenty-first century, Chicano studies must be impactful beyond the university, challenging the structural inequities confronted decades ago at its founding.

⁴ Ramírez notes that the call for such an education can be found as early as 1903 in the work of W.E.B. Du Boise, as well as that of Carter G. Woodson (1933). Ramírez builds directly on Christine E. Sleeter, *The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies: A research Review* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 2011).

⁵ Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (London: Verso, 1989), 191-196; De Vere Edwin Pentony, Robert Smith, and Richard Axen, *Unfinished Rebellions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971).

⁶ "History of NACCS," National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies. <https://www.naccs.org/naccs/History.asp>. Accessed February 11, 2020; Zaragoza Vargas, "Fifteenth Annual National Association of Chicano Studies Conference," *International Labor and Working-Class History* no. 33 (1988): 102-05. Accessed February 12, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/27671747.

⁷ Irene Blea, *Researching Chicano Communities: Socio-Historical, Physical, Psychological, and Spiritual Space* (New York: Praeger, 1995), 26-55; Richard A. García, "The Origins of Chicano Cultural Thought: Visions and Paradigms: Romano's Culturalism, Alurista's Aesthetics, and Acuña's Communalism," *California History* 74 no. 3 (Fall 1995): 290-305; Michael Soldatenko, *Chicano*

Studies: The Genesis of a Discipline (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2009), 59-60.

⁸ “Business Meeting Minutes,” *Noticias de NACCS*,” 38 no.2 (May 2009), 8; Miner, Dylan A.T., *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding Across Turtle Island* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 45-48.

⁹ “Indigenous Peoples/Indigenous Knoweldges Caucus,” National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies. https://www.naccs.org/naccs/What_is_a_Caucus1.asp.February_15, 2020. See website for full statement.

¹⁰ Southern Poverty Law Center, *Combating Nativism: Protecting the Rights of Immigrants*, Montgomery: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019; Eva Namusoke, “A Divided Family: Race, the Commonwealth and Brexit,” *Round Table* 105 no.5 (2016): 463-476; Yardena Schwartz, “Springtime for Petry,” *Newsweek Global*, March, 17, 2017, 38-43; Alan Feuer and Andrew Higgins, “Extremists Turn to a Leader to Protect Western Values: Vladimir Putin,” *New York Times*, December 3, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/03/world/americas/alt-right-vladimir-putin.html>; Owen Matthews, “Putin to Russia: We Will Bury Ourselves,” *Newsweek Global*, July 20, 2014. <https://www.newsweek.com/2014/06/20/putins-paranoia-card-254513.html>.

¹¹ Louis G. Menoza, “Memoir of un Ser Humano: The Life and Times of raulrsalinas,” *NACCS Annual Conference Proceedings* (2018): 31-41. <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/naccs/2018/Proceedings/7>. See also Mendoza, “The Re-Education of a Xicanindio: Raúl Salinas and the Poetics of Pinto Transformation,” *MELUS* 28 no.1 (Spring 2003): 39-60.

¹² Olguín, B.V., “Tattoos, Abjection, and the Political Unconscious: Toward a Semiotics of the Pinto Visual Vernacular,” *Cultural Critique* 37 (Autumn, 1997): 194-195.

¹³ See her interview with Natalie Avalos in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (2016) for a discussion of her education, research, and commitment to Indigenous knowledge and power.

¹⁴ Inés Talamantez, “A Mindful Invitation: Una invitación,” in *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), xi.

¹⁵ Elisa Linda Facio, “Writing in the Borderlands: The Implications of Anzaldúan Thought for Chicana Feminist Sociology,” *Chicana/Latina Studies* 10 no. 1 (Fall 2010): 77.

¹⁶ Emma Pérez, “Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor,” in *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, edited by Carla Trujillo (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1991), 174-179.