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The Ascent and Decline of an American Colony

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CRITICAL DIÁLOGO 1

US Imperialism and Colonial Legacies of Latinx Migrations

The first critical diálogo sets the tone for the explicit comparative and relational dimensions of the anthology. This critical diálogo focuses on US settler colonialism westward and empire building in the Atlantic, the US racialization of colonial subjects and spaces of “model” subjectivities, and the affective and emotive outcomes of land appropriation and boundary policing. There would be no discussion of “Latino” or “Latino Studies” as a field had it not been for the migrations and exile conditions caused by US interventions in Central America, the Caribbean, and South America as well as what became the US Southwest. These conditions are as evident in the current historical moment as they were throughout the twentieth century. Beginning with the historical contexts, rather than, say, a focus on “Latinx/a/o” as a series of cultural identity practices, allows us to provide the framing for identities as social constructs rather than cultural references. Moreover, given the contemporary condition of fascist and white supremacist tendencies, both in the United States and in the Americas more broadly, we believe it is important to remind readers that there are parallels to be drawn between various old-school modalities of US support of South American dictatorships, North American and Central American land grabbing, and the militarization of the Caribbean, and more contemporary neoliberal and financial involvement in the Americas. An opening diálogo on US Imperialism and Colonial Legacies of Latinx Migrations, to us, provides the best explanation to why Latin Americans “migrate” to the United States. It is not only in pursuit of some mythical “American dream” but because they have been, quite literally, uprooted by US policies in their respective countries. The critical diálogo in this section revolves around the question: *What can the histories of specific national, regional, and temporal communities tell us about the shifts and modifications of US colonial and imperial nation-state projects?*

Pedro Cabán’s discussion of Puerto Rico under US empire and Laura Pulido’s study of settler colonialism and nonnative people of color approach this question by highlighting the geopolitical and historical manipulations of US empire building, both within the US nation-state and at its edges. Significantly, these processes of empire have to be situated in US interventionism and regimes of representation as suggested by Susan Coutin’s focus on accompaniment and sanctuary practices at various border crossings and Maria Elena Cepeda’s examination of transnational scripts and gendered formations of Colombianidad.

Puerto Rico

The Ascent and Decline of an American Colony

PEDRO CABÁN

Puerto Rico has been a territorial possession of the United States for over 120 years. During this period, the United States has imposed a colonial state that has governed Puerto Rico and managed its political economy. The colonial state has taken numerous forms, beginning in 1898 as a military regime, and currently as a titular democratic government that is subservient to a financial control board that the US Congress imposed in 2016. In the following pages I compare two transformative periods in Puerto Rican history: 1898 to 1900 and 2016 to 2019. These junctures bookend the history of US colonial rule, which is marked by Puerto Rico's early conversion into a lucrative commercial and strategically significant asset of the evolving American empire and its subsequent descent into a debt-ridden, poverty-stricken, ecologically damaged territorial possession of questionable value to the United States. These two periods are marked by the imposition of two very different colonial state forms.

After wresting control of Puerto Rico from Spain in 1898, the United States installed a military regime that ruled by decree for two years. On April 12, 1900, almost nine months after Hurricane San Ciriaco devastated the archipelago, President McKinley signed into law the Foraker Act, which would “temporarily provide revenues and a civil government for Porto Rico, and for other purposes.”¹ The law forced Puerto Ricans to bear the expenses of their own colonial subordination. The Foraker Act created a colonial state with virtually absolute power over the lives of Puerto Ricans. But it also was a sweeping policy to rapidly promote American capitalist development. All key officials were appointed by the president. But in order to gain the acquiescence of Puerto Rico's political leaders, the Foraker Act set up a popularly elected lower house.

On July 1, 2016, the United States enacted the Puerto Rican Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA). The law rescinded the colonial state's budgetary authority that US Congress had granted in 1952 when it approved the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (or the *Estado Libre Asociado* in Spanish). PROMESA created a Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB), which effectively displaced the colonial state in managing the island's political economy. Today Puerto Rico is under the technocratic

rule of an externally imposed financial control board whose primary function is to extract value from an impoverished island nation for the benefit of financial capital.

During each of the two periods (1898 to 1900 and 2016 to 2019), Puerto Rico was devastated by hurricanes. On August 19, 1899, barely a year after General Nelson Miles's troops invaded Puerto Rico, the island was struck by Hurricane San Ciriaco. San Ciriaco was described as one of the most destructive hurricanes to ever strike the island. The governor-general accurately predicted that the hurricane "will be long remembered in the history of Porto Rico."² On September 17, 2017, fourteen months after PROMESA was signed into law, Hurricane María devastated Puerto Rico. No other hurricane caused as much loss of life and destruction of property as did María. Its effects on a traumatized but resilient society have lingered. Both hurricanes transformed the economic landscape, profoundly disrupted the lives of millions of Puerto Ricans, and tested the capability of the federal government and colonial state to manage relief and rehabilitation operations. The hurricanes also created an array of challenges to colonial rule and contributed to changes in colonial policy.

By comparing two distinct and brief moments that are approximately 120 years apart, this essay highlights the persistent fault lines in US colonial rule. The exigencies of American imperialism are translated into particular colonial state forms and policies that are intended to advance the strategic and material interests of the empire. But the state form is always provisional since it creates conditions for its own dissolution. This is simply because the colonial state is never intended to be a democratic institution that is responsive to the people of Puerto Rico. Its primary function is to maintain political stability in an environment that is continually under assault, either from hurricanes or economic policies that push ever more Puerto Ricans into precarity. The resulting inequities are the source of labor conflict, strikes, multiple forms of resistance and noncompliance, and as the summer of 2019 showed, massive public uprisings. Another fault line is the failure of colonialism to socialize Puerto Ricans into believing that their political subordination is a consequence of the inferiority of their culture. The uprising revealed in uniquely Puerto Rican fashion their refusal to submit to the dictates of Americanization. Rather than embrace American exceptionalism, the Puerto Ricans create and nurture its antithesis: a vibrantly expressive national cultural identity that draws on and reinterprets the iconography of a century of resistance to colonialism.

Political and National Disasters under Colonialism

After ejecting Spain from the Caribbean, US capital flowed into Puerto Rico and Cuba to finance the development of the sugar industry. Puerto Rico was soon converted into a vital source of sugar for the US market. But Puerto Rico

also figured prominently in the strategic calculations of American expansionists. The island nation was designated as a forward defense station for the soon to be built Panama Canal. Famed naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan observed that the canal “can affect the rapid peopling of the American Pacific coasts” and this would be an “inestimable contribution toward overcoming the problem of distribution and that of labor.” The canal would also “disperse the threatening question of Asiatic immigration to the Pacific coasts by filling up the ground” and allow for the “indefinite strengthening of Anglo-Saxon institutions upon the northwest shores of the Pacific.”³ It is ironic that Puerto Rico was implicated in a strategy to spread Anglo Saxon institutions and values in order to block Asian immigration.

The governor-generals who ruled Puerto Rico (1898 to 1900) promoted Puerto Rico’s transition to a sugar-based economy under the control of absentee monopoly corporations. The military regime enacted an array of monetary, fiscal, tariff measures that, in combination with the abundance of cheap rural labor, virtually guaranteed the sugar corporations obscene profits. Investments flowed into Puerto Rico, and the economy was restructured to satisfy the burgeoning American market for sugar. The coffee industry was especially hurt by these policies. Deprived of credit and once vibrant export markets, the coffee industry would never regain its dominant position. Moreover, the coffee plantations were particularly vulnerable to hurricane damage, as San Ciriaco would prove. The change in sovereignty and the hurricane initiated a far-reaching and long-lasting transformation of Puerto Rican economy and society.

Hurricane San Ciriaco (August 8, 1899)

Puerto Rico has been victimized by many hurricanes, but until María struck in 2017, San Ciriaco was singular for the loss of life and property it inflicted on the island. The Category 5 hurricane was a catastrophic event that killed more than four thousand people, most of whom drowned. The loss of lives exceeded threefold the total lives lost in all “previously recorded hurricanes.”⁴ “Property loss was calculated as \$20 million [\$6 billion in 2019].”⁵ Puerto Rico was ill prepared for the hurricane. Overnight the hurricane exposed Puerto Rico’s vulnerabilities by creating a humanitarian disaster of unprecedented proportions. Four months after the hurricane, 221,087 people—almost a quarter of the population of 918,926—were indigent, and death rates increased from 26 to 35 per 1000 inhabitants.⁶ General Davis, the governor-general, reported, “The people were without available resources and without the means of getting any, food was destroyed, business paralyzed.”⁷

San Ciriaco devastated the coffee plantations. Coffee was the country’s primary export crop and comprised the largest percentage of export earnings in 1899. Over 250,000 of Puerto Rico’s 800,000 peones depended on the coffee industry for their livelihood.⁸ San Ciriaco left in its wake an economy in

shambles, a huge unemployed rural labor force, and thousands of impoverished Puerto Ricans who faced imminent starvation. Resolution of the crisis was a national security issue. The United States was a late imperialist power without any experience in the management of overseas territories. If colonial officials failed to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in a small tropical island, European imperialist powers would view the United States as an ineffectual, possibly bumbling nascent colonizer. The United States feared that failure in Puerto Rico would embolden its European rivals to challenge America's growing hegemony in Latin America and the Caribbean. Moreover, failure to resolve the crisis would humiliate Elihu Root, who as secretary of war was America's foremost prominent of imperialism. He famously declared that "we of America . . . possess the supreme capacity not merely to govern ourselves at home . . . but the capacity to govern men wherever they were found."⁹

The United States War Department, which had jurisdiction over the newly acquired overseas territories, acted quickly to stave off a humanitarian crisis. The department allocated \$400,000 (\$11.3 million in 2017) for emergency relief. Congress authorized a miserly \$200,000 for individual emergency relief but was willing to provide \$950,000 for road construction to provide employment for "people who are suffering from starvation and sickness."¹⁰ The Central Porto Rico Relief Committee, headed by New York governor Theodore Roosevelt, collected private donations and shipped 32,445,000 pounds of food to Puerto Rico, in addition to clothing and medicine.¹¹ General Davis reported that "supplies of all sorts were being rapidly forwarded to the island, and at one time during the month of September it looked as if we would be swamped with the large amount of these supplies."¹²

Notwithstanding the War Department's energetic relief efforts, conditions in the mountainous regions were alarming. A War Department official estimated that two hundred thousand people were on the verge of starvation and warned that "if not fed at home they will migrate to the cities, leaving the weak to die."¹³ Colonial officials faced two critical situations in the aftermath of San Ciriaco. They had to avert an impending humanitarian crisis of a scale that possibly was unmatched in the United States. They also had to create jobs for uncounted thousands of rural workers who lost their livelihood after the farms and plantations were destroyed. General Davis warned that the "most important problem . . . was not economic, but humanitarian. It was a question of saving human lives, not for a day or a week, but for many weeks."¹⁴ Colonial officials feared that the collapse of the coffee industry would create uncontrolled internal migration. Lacking any means of subsistence, thousands of desperate, landless rural workers from the mountainous cordillera would be forced to migrate to the overpopulated coastal areas and create an unimaginable labor surplus. Restoration of the coffee industry was an urgent priority.

The colonial authorities were beseeched by the planters, who faced financial ruin if they did not receive support. The planters bristled at the discriminatory

fiscal and monetary measures adopted by the military, “which greatly diminished our wealth . . . has resulted in the present ruinous condition of the coffee industry.”¹⁵ The planters warned that without federal assistance, the industry would be destroyed. Elihu Root pleaded with the US Congress to protect the industry because “the importance of this crop is so great, and its success or failure so far reaching and widespread.”¹⁶ The irony in all this was that Root himself bore responsibility for the policies that undermined the coffee industry. General Davis acknowledged that those policies “resulted in incalculable harm to the entire population,” and that “trade and agriculture languished.”¹⁷ San Ciriaco marked the beginning of the end for the coffee industry in Puerto Rico and accelerated the colony’s conversion into a labor surplus economy. San Ciriaco was a wake-up call that a wage-based economy, especially one dominated by the sugar industry, was incapable of creating sufficient employment for the island’s growing population. Colonial officials, concerned that the growing legions of impoverished and unemployed rural workers would threaten the colonial enterprise, began to promote emigration in 1900 to reduce the surplus population.

Henry Allen, appointed civilian governor in 1900, introduced two themes that for decades would shape the official discourse about labor migration under capitalism in Puerto Rico. He observed that Puerto Rico “has plenty of laborers and poor people generally.” What Puerto Rico needed, Allen said, “were men,” presumably white Americans, “with capital, energy and enterprise to develop its latent industries and reclaim its sugar estates.”¹⁸ Hurricane San Ciriaco disrupted labor markets and increased the ranks of the impoverished unemployed peones. The hurricane created the perfect opportunity for Allen to put his ideas into effect. In 1900, after hurricane San Ciriaco had devastated the fields and farms, labor recruiters for the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association, the Cotton Growers Association, and other producer associations descended on Puerto Rico hoping to hire workers from the vast pool of surplus labor. More than six thousand Puerto Ricans signed labor contracts and were shipped to Hawaii between 1900 and 1901. Puerto Ricans were also recruited for work in Arizona and a host of other countries. Allen’s proposition that the abundance of labor and the scarcity of foreign capital are inimical to Puerto Rico’s development has endured to the present.¹⁹ According to this perverse Malthusian reasoning, overpopulation is the major culprit for the unemployment and poverty that afflicts Puerto Rico. This logic absolves the colonial state from ever questioning a growth strategy based on maximizing the profitability of foreign corporations at the expense of the residents.

Hurricane María (September 20, 2017)

María was the most destructive hurricane to strike Puerto Rico in modern history. The most recent study by Harvard University researchers estimates that

4,645 people died between September 20 and December 31, 2017.²⁰ According to Moody's Investors Service, Puerto Rico sustained \$95 billion in property damage and lost production.²¹ The catastrophe traumatized the population and created a humanitarian crisis beyond the capability of US mainland or Puerto Rican authorities to resolve. Hurricane María also triggered massive emigration. The United States has been a safety valve through which Puerto Rico's surplus population has flowed since 1900. Prior to the 2006 economic depression, the colonial state planned and participated in the removal of surplus labor. Emigration increased significantly after the 2006 economic depression. The migration of Puerto Ricans between 1950 and 1960 "was one of the greatest peacetime population movements recorded in contemporary history."²² The exodus of Puerto Ricans to the United States after Hurricane María is without parallel and has ominous implications for Puerto Rico's future economic well-being.

Few would have envisioned that the outmigration of Puerto Ricans since 2005 would surpass the totals recorded during the post-World War II period. Puerto Rico's population stood at 3.19 million in 2019, about the same size as the population four decades ago. Puerto Rico reached its peak population in 2004 and has dropped by 632,000 since then. In 2018, a year after María, the population had declined by 3.9 percent, the largest year-to-year drop in seventy years.²³ The Center for Puerto Rican Studies estimated that in the twelve months following María, over two hundred thousand Puerto Ricans had migrated to the United States.²⁴ The initial emigration after María was made up of vulnerable and traumatized hurricane survivors. Subsequent emigration was comprised of those who envisioned a dire economic future: low wages, closed schools, shrunken university, understaffed and under-resourced public health facilities, which will only worsen if the junta succeeds in inflicting even more severe austerity.

For over a century, migration was regulated by two factors: (1) labor demand in the mainland and high unemployment in Puerto Rico and (2) government policy to remove surplus population. But after María, Puerto Rico experienced for the first time in its history systemic depopulation. María intensified the pressures for Puerto Ricans to leave their devastated homeland. Puerto Ricans were abandoning their homeland out of a sense of despair and the painful realization that a dire economic future may await those who stay.

Virtually every facet of the physical and human infrastructure collapsed: roads, bridges, dams and water, communications, and electrical stopped functioning for lengthy periods. Hospitals and other public health care facilities systems, already battered by inhumane budget cuts, could simply not cope with the enormity of the human tragedy. But the enormity of the devastation and death is also attributable to the colonial state's decision to disinvest in the infrastructure and permit its gradual erosion. Government austerity measures predating the installation of the junta undermined Puerto Rico's resilience and ability to recover from a natural disaster. Both the pro-statehood New Progressive Party

(PNP) and commonwealth Partido Popular Democratico (PPD) slashed the government work force by tens of thousands and reduced public services.²⁵ The government drastically reduced expenditures for roads, water treatment facilities, schools, and other critical elements of the physical and human infrastructure from \$2.4 billion in 2012 to \$906 million in 2017. The University of Puerto Rico budget was slashed by 20 percent.²⁶ The decisions invariably revealed the colonial state's determination to protect the interests of capital and the expense of the of the population. Yet investors believed that homegrown austerity by the PPD and PNP was not sufficiently harsh to halt the descent to bankruptcy.

The federal government quickly established the Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) after Governor Alejandro García's dramatic announcement that Puerto Rico's \$74 billion debt was not payable. The federal government lacked confidence in the colonial state's ability to protect the interests of American institutions or investors and hedge funds that had amassed the vast majority of Puerto Rican municipal bonds. The FOMB is an autonomous entity that serves as a collection agency for high-risk speculators and hedge funds. "La Junta," as the board is commonly known, is laser focused on slashing government expenditures, reducing costs, and increasing tax revenues to amass savings that will be used to pay the bondholders.²⁷ The magnitude of the reduction in government expenditures prompted large protests, disruptions of board meetings, strikes by university students, angry letters from US legislators, lawsuits, and even denunciations by then-governor Ricardo Rosselló. The impact of pre-María cuts to Puerto Rico's infrastructure magnified the damage caused by the hurricane. The FOMB's latest fiscal plan further weakened the infrastructure and increased Puerto Rico's vulnerability to future hurricanes by slashing government spending by \$629 million in 2019 and imposing total reductions of \$1.6 billion by 2020.²⁸

Most of the cuts will be for education, health care, and public pensions, a direct attack on Puerto Rico's human infrastructure and human capital. In a letter to the junta, senator Elizabeth Warren, representative Nydia Velázquez, and others express "grave concern" that the junta was siphoning off federal funds "intended to benefit the people of Puerto Rico to creditors" and that this was unacceptable.²⁹ To add insult to injury, Puerto Rico is required to provide the board with a "dedicated source of funding, not subject to further legislative action, to cover its expenses."³⁰ PROMESA requires Puerto Rico to pay for all the costs the junta will incur, including salaries for board members, staff, and consultants. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the costs are conservatively expected to reach \$370 million for the decade starting 2016.³¹ The fiscal crisis that consumed Puerto Rico's political class and caused anxiety among investors further impoverished a vulnerable population. Deploying the colonial state so openly in the interests of capital helps us comprehend why Hurricane María was such an epoch-making catastrophe whose impact reverberated in massive protests that brought down a government in the summer of 2019.

The Trump administration's emergency response after Hurricane María devastated Puerto Rico may well stand out as one of the most ineffectual and incompetently managed episodes in Puerto Rico's history as a colony of the United States. The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and the US Department of Defense were the lead agencies tasked with disaster relief and recovery. FEMA's inadequate and disorganized response to the humanitarian crisis was evident from the outset. FEMA was absent during the initial days after the hurricane laid waste to Puerto Rico. Subsequently, FEMA failed to coordinate the relief efforts among the dozens of different nonprofit organizations and government officials involved in the response.³² Puerto Rican and other Latinx members of the US Congress repeatedly demanded that the Trump administration act decisively, and they warned of a mounting death toll. Representative Luis Gutierrez, for instance, noted that, "We know the U.S. is capable. We can invade foreign countries with hundreds of thousands of troops, flawless communications, food, and security."³³ According to Irwin Redlener, director of National Center for Disaster Preparedness, the US Pentagon knew that Puerto Rico was on the verge of a humanitarian crisis but failed to act because "President Donald Trump did not think it was necessary."³⁴ Refugees International reported that the federal and Puerto Rican governments' response "was still largely uncoordinated and poorly implemented and that was prolonging the humanitarian emergency on the ground."³⁵

Indeed, the General Accountability Office and FEMA itself concluded in separate reports, released in the summer of 2018, that FEMA was unprepared for the scale of relief and recovery effort, was slow to respond, and that it deployed personnel who lacked the required training and expertise, including even rudimentary knowledge of Spanish.³⁶ FEMA responded quickly and decisively to the victims of Hurricane Harvey, but in contrast it could only manage a flawed response to the victims of María. FEMA approved \$141.8 million in individual assistance to Harvey victims nine days after the hurricane struck but only \$6.2 million for María victims during the same period. Nine days after Harvey, the federal government had deployed thirty thousand personnel in the Houston region but only ten thousand at the same point for María.³⁷

As criticism of the federal disaster relief effort mounted, President Trump publicly dismissed the seriousness of the crisis and launched deceptive and derogatory tweets about Puerto Ricans and their political leadership. In contrast to the federal government's indecisiveness, Puerto Ricans in the United States organized scores of local and national committees and associations to collect donations for survivors of Hurricane María and arranged the required transportation. In Puerto Rico, hurricane survivors organized dozens of autonomous *centros de apoyo mutuo* ("grassroots centers for mutual aid") and solidarity networks, and they provided support to ravished communities as the "negligence of the governments continues to make the people suffer."³⁸ Without the efforts of these associations, the death count would have undoubtedly been greater.

Hurricanes, Crisis, and the Colonial State

Hurricanes San Ciriaco and María are gateways to interrogate multiple dimensions of US colonialism in Puerto Rico. The two periods—1898 to 1900 and 2016 to 2019—were transformative moments in Puerto Rico’s modern history. Both periods start with a transformation in the colonial state form imposed by the federal government. In 1899, the United States disbanded Puerto Rico’s parliamentary government, imposed a military government and transitioned to a civilian administered colonial state. In 2016 the federal government imposed a financial control board which usurped the colonial states’ fiscal and budgetary authority. In both instances the federal government effected a transition to alternate colonial state forms more capable of advancing US interests.

Hurricanes have compromised the colonial state’s ability to effectively manage the island’s political economy. The US federal government had to adjust its colonial policy, and even transition to a new colonial state form after San Ciriaco. It did so again in 1932 after Hurricanes Felipe and Ciprian devastated Puerto Rico.³⁹ The downfall of Ricardo Rosselló’s administration in the summer of 2019 is the result of widespread revulsion with his administration’s corruption and for its mismanagement of the hurricane relief and recovery program. The release of 889 pages of private chats between the governor and his inner circle in which they mock the dead of Hurricane Maria and freely engaged in misogynistic and homophobic banter was the necessary spark that unleashed the people’s repressed anger. Moreover, the chats revealed that Rosselló and his clique held the Puerto Rican population in the same contempt as did Trump and other racists that populate his administration.

The extraordinary events between 2016 and 2019 gave rise to a new political consciousness and the proliferation of activist and solidary networks, feminist collectives and community-based *centros de apoyos mutuo*.⁴⁰ These organizations were in the vanguard of the nation-wide summer uprising of 2019 that forced the resignation of Rosselló. They provoked the crisis of legitimacy that may make the archipelago ungovernable. The 2019 summer uprising dramatically recast a long-standing portrayal of Puerto Rico as a hapless colony whose people either fatalistically accepted their plight or lamentably were forced to emigrate to the United States. The historically unprecedented uprising was a collective repudiation of the corrupt, incompetent and morally bankrupt political class that nourishes itself on the colonial state’s resources and power. The political class was astonished that a determined cross-generational movement inexplicably rose to renounce the instrumentalities and agents of colonial oppression.

The current crisis of governability raises provocative possibilities about altering colonial policy, and suggests the possibility of a new state form in the coming years. At this point, in the aftermath of the largest public uprising in Puerto Rico’s history it is premature to suppose that a new state form will be imposed. But the

Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal some congressional Republicans, and even the FOMB have called for amending PROMESA to give la junta greater powers in determining how Puerto Rico is governed. But Puerto Ricans angrily reject this plan to consolidate further power in the unelected board. In Washington Raúl Grijalva Chairman House Natural Resources Committee was warned that the junta “should not view this as an opportunity to amass more unelected power over the lives of the residents of Puerto Rico.”⁴¹ The *consejos de apoyo mutuo* that helped organize the massive protest have been the moving force behind the creation of *assembleas de pueblo*. These are informal associations comprised of the residents of *municipios* (municipalities) throughout Puerto Rico. The *assembleas* are practicing and promoting a new form of participatory and inclusive democracy. Their efforts have been supported by the Puerto Rican Independence Party, that has proposed major changes to Puerto Rico’s constitution to make the insular government more accountable to the people. The conditions are emerging for the possibility of a new state form. What that will be is unknown. But it is clear that PROMESA was the empire’s way of saying that the Estado Libre Asociado had outlived its usefulness. Puerto Ricans know that the colonial state is in crisis and vulnerable to change. Protestors cleverly called attention to this by loudly chanting “si, si el ELA se murió, y el pueblo lo interró.”⁴²

Nowhere is the contradistinction between the two historical moments outlined in this essay more stark than in the federal government’s disaster relief responses to hurricanes San Ciriaco and María. In the wake of San Ciriaco, the War Department took exclusive command of the emergency relief and recovery campaign. The official records depict a competent military government that responded with efficiency and alacrity to the immediacy of the humanitarian crisis. In contrast, the Trump administration and the Rosselló administration demonstrated staggering ineptitude in the aftermath of Hurricane María. Barely two weeks after the hurricane President Trump recklessly tweeted that Puerto Ricans “want everything to be done for them.”⁴³ And after learning of the initial estimate of 3,000 Hurricane María related deaths, Trump ridiculed the number and absolved his administration of culpability for loss of life. He fumed that “The people of Puerto Rico have one of the most corrupt governments in our country,”⁴⁴ an ironic if not disingenuous claim given his own ethically compromised and scandal prone administration.⁴⁵ No US president has so wantonly defamed Puerto Ricans as incompetent, venal, and indolent. Trump’s boastful claims that FEMA and he had done an extraordinary job in responding to the emergency, despite the mounting evidence to the contrary, is an iconic instance of imperial hubris. His aggressive dismissals of calls for aid to Puerto Rico is as much a measure of his disdain for black and brown people as it is an indictment of Puerto Rico’s marginality to the American empire. Trump’s outrageous outburst is merely another instance of a US official denigrating the people of Puerto Rico.⁴⁶ After all, racism is constitutive of colonialism.

Admittedly, no recent US president has so deliberately and openly sought to diminish Puerto Ricans as has Trump. Yet Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama each made fateful decisions that set Puerto Rico on a trajectory that has resulted in today's crisis. President Clinton rescinded Section 936 which precipitated Puerto Rico's deindustrialization and is the starting point of the crisis.⁴⁷ President Bush demilitarized Puerto Rico, resulting in a loss of hundreds of millions that flowed into the local economy and by failing to provide assistance during the wrenching transition. President Obama approved PROMESA. Each bears a measure of culpability for the crisis that has befallen Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico reached its apogee as a strategic asset and profitable investment site for US capital between the end of World War II through the Reagan administration. Operation Bootstrap and the establishment of the *Estado Libre Asociado* were achievements unimaginable in 1898. Puerto Rico's current financial crisis, the erosion of its strategic relevance and the stripping of its limited powers of self-government were unimaginable in 1952. Hurricane María was a dramatically poignant revelation that commonwealth is no longer viable. Puerto Rico has become an anachronistic millstone of a now defunct imperialist logic. It is a territorial possession with no function in the current iteration of the American empire.

Conclusion

The brief period from 2016 to 2019 was as transformative for Puerto Rico as was the 1898/1900 period. On the eve of the 20th century the blunt exercise of United States power and the destructive wrath of nature dragooned Puerto Rico into the American imperial project. For nearly a century Puerto Rico held a privileged status in the American empire. But this ended over two decades ago with the closing of US military bases and after American multinational capital abandoned Puerto Rico. The United States has demonstrated a determination through PROMESA and the courts to compel Puerto Rico's subservience. It has also permitted the social desolation and health crisis caused by Hurricane María to fester.

Ultimately the key difference between the metaphorical bookends is that in 1898/1900 the United States constructed a colony in the service of an expanding empire, whereas in 2016/2019 it is forced to deal with an impoverished colony that is irrelevant to American global aspirations. Hurricane María inflicted such overwhelming human and physical devastation that the junta may have erroneously assumed Puerto Ricans would be inured to the suffering its austerity measures have caused. But the people of Puerto Rico, on the island nation and in the diaspora, are waging a vigorous resistance campaign, are demanding the social justice and equity that they rightly claim is their due as citizens of the United States. The 2019 summer uprising suggest that young people will resist austerity rather than emigrate to the increasingly racially and politically polarized

United States. Older Puerto Ricans marched alongside the intrepid young and demanded with equal vigor that Rosselló resign. Puerto Ricans of all generations have come to the realization that Trump's America is deadly hostile toward Latinos. And Puerto Ricans, despite being US citizens do not think of themselves as Americanos nor are they perceived as such.

The events of 2016–2019 may well mark the death knell of a colonial project nurtured by the myth of US beneficence and enlightened administration. The extraordinary events between 2016 and 2019 gave rise to a new political consciousness and the proliferation of activist and solidary networks, feminist collectives and community-based *centros de apoyos mutuo*. These organizations were in the vanguard of the nation-wide summer uprising of 2019 that forced the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló and has thrown the colonial state into crisis. The massive and sustained popular protests dramatically recast a long-standing portrayal of Puerto Rico as a hapless colony whose people either fatalistically accepted their plight or lamentably were forced to emigrate to the United States. The historically unprecedented uprising was a collective repudiation of the corrupt and incompetent political class that nourishes itself on the resources of the colonial state. The government was astonished that a determined cross-generational movement inexplicably rose to renounce the instrumentalities and agents of colonial oppression.

NOTES

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- 3 Alfred T. Mahan, "The Panama Canal and Sea Power in the Pacific," *The Century Magazine*, 82, no. 2 (June 2, 1911): 243.
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Borders and Crossings

Lessons of the 1980s Central American Solidarity Movement for 2010s Sanctuary Practices

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Since the 2016 election of President Trump, who vowed to prioritize removing undocumented immigrants from the United States (Hirschfeld and Preston 2016), “sanctuary” has become a key term both for immigrant rights advocates who seek to protect and empower immigrants regardless of their legal status and for restrictionists who condemn policies that treat the undocumented as members of US communities (Daniels 2018). While these debates focus on student tuition, access to driver’s licenses, and police collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the term *sanctuary* dates back to the medieval custom of granting church refuge to fugitives and more recently to the 1980s practice of US congregations declaring themselves sanctuaries for Salvadorans and Guatemalans who were fleeing death squads and civil war in Central America (Bau 1985). Sanctuary practices of the 1980s engaged and sought to counter US imperialism and intervention in Central American countries. By engaging directly with Central Americans who had been forced to migrate and by drawing attention to human rights abuses being perpetrated by governments that the United States supported, sanctuary activists challenged these histories of exclusion.

Drawing on ethnographic engagement with the 1980s movement as well as over three decades of engaged research within Central American immigrant communities in the United States, my contribution describes the conditions that led Central Americans to seek asylum in the United States during the 1980s, the sanctuary practices developed at the time, and the connections between those events and current Central American migration and advocacy.¹ Solidary activists accompanied Central American communities at risk of political violence, pursued changes in refugee and immigration law and policy, and opposed interventionist foreign policies. The 1980s movement laid the groundwork for today’s struggles, such as the effort to secure residency for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) recipients, support the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), aid refugees, and prevent deportations. Yet some sectors of the 1980s movement engaged in paternalistic practices, while the movement’s focus on refugee rights

fueled hierarchies of deservingness by distinguishing political refugees from economic immigrants. Current solidarity work can avoid these pitfalls by transcending borders, creating alternatives to state-based categories of membership, and building communities of practice. Importantly, transnational activism can counter the histories of exclusion that underlie racialized divisions between citizens and noncitizens.

Political Violence and US Foreign Policy

In the United States, sanctuary practices emerged during the 1980s in response to political violence and civil war that uprooted millions of Central Americans. Central American civil wars were fought over access to land, a more equitable distribution of resources, and political repression. In Guatemala, a US-backed coup in 1954 deposed democratically elected president Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, and room for political opposition shrank. Repression and entrenched social inequality gave rise to armed insurgency, launching a civil war that lasted until peace accords were signed in 1996. During this period, Guatemalan military and paramilitary groups perpetrated human rights abuses against civilians, especially Indigenous groups, who faced massacres and were forcibly displaced from their villages (Nelson 1999). In El Salvador, right-wing governments opposed reforms and persecuted opponents, including the Catholic Church, which sought to defend the poor. In 1980, Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero was gunned down, a killing that has been attributed to Roberto D'Aubuisson, a Salvadoran military leader who organized death squads and founded the political party ARENA (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista, Nationalist Republican Alliance). Guerrilla groups banded together as the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) and fought a twelve-year struggle, from 1980 to 1992, against the Salvadoran Armed Forces. During these years, roadblocks, battles, and massacres were widespread throughout El Salvador, and to prevent civilians from supporting the guerrillas, the Salvadoran Armed Forces strafed the countryside (Byrne 1996). Following peace accords in 1992, the FMLN became a political party and has won the Salvadoran presidency twice. In Nicaragua, the Sandinista National Liberation Front overthrew the dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979, but the United States supported right-wing insurgents, the Contras, throughout the 1980s.

Adopting a cold war lens, the United States considered Salvadoran and Guatemalan governments to be fighting against communism. Despite widespread human rights abuses, the United States provided extensive military and economic assistance to El Salvador and Guatemala during the 1980s. Because the United States supported repressive governments in El Salvador and Guatemala, accepting refugees from those countries threatened to undermine US foreign policy. In 1984, less than 3 percent of the asylum claims filed by Salvadorans

and Guatemalans were granted, in contrast to approval rates in the range of 32 to 60 percent for applicants from Poland, Afghanistan, and Iran (Gzesh 2006). Nicaraguans who came to the United States when the left-leaning Sandinistas were in power were given temporary protection through the Nicaraguan Review Program, which was initiated in 1987 and largely prevented Nicaraguans from being deported (Congressional Research Service 1998).

Consistent with the US government's view that Salvadorans and Guatemalans were undeserving of asylum, US detention centers used coercive practices to pressure Central Americans to leave voluntarily instead of filing asylum claims. Detainees were not informed of their right to apply for asylum, were threatened with lengthy detention, and were prevented from meeting with attorneys. A class action suit, *Orantes Hernández v. Meese*, resulted in a permanent injunction preventing these tactics (Gzesh 2006).

To counter this discriminatory treatment, advocates pursued redress in the courts while also trying to sway public opinion. During the 1980s, congregations declared themselves “sanctuaries” for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees in order to advocate for asylum while also challenging US aid to Salvadoran and Guatemalan governments.

Sanctuary Practices and Legacies

The term “sanctuary” has been used to refer to a place of safety, a sacred space governed by “higher” law and open to the most deeply stigmatized (Bau 1985). Sanctuary designations infuse spaces with contested legal, religious, moral, or ethical meanings, differentiating them from surrounding areas (see also Mountz 2013). Today, cities, states, and campuses have adopted the term “sanctuary” for policies that make particular jurisdictions, spaces, and institutions places of safety for noncitizens. Sanctuary policies may prohibit local police from enforcing federal immigration law, protect individuals' records from disclosure, and extend rights to individuals regardless of immigration status (Bauder 2017; Ridgley 2008). California, for example, has enabled undocumented students at public universities to pay in-state tuition rates, granted driver's licenses to the undocumented, and shortened criminal sentences to prevent noncitizens from incurring immigration consequences for certain criminal convictions (Ramakrishnan and Colbern 2015). Current sanctuary measures thus range from noncooperation with enforcement initiatives to active inclusion of noncitizens.

Sanctuary activists of the 1980s deployed “sanctuary” in a somewhat different fashion (Coutin 1993). Invoking the medieval tradition of church refuge for fugitives, they defined sanctuary both more narrowly—in most instances limiting sanctuary to Central American refugees rather than to all undocumented immigrants—and more broadly, in that many activists sought not only to provide food, shelter, transportation, medical care, and legal assistance to refugees

but also to impact conditions in refugees' homelands. The 1980s sanctuary movement was therefore deeply transnational, responding as much to human rights violations in Central America and US support for authoritarian governments as to denying refuge to Central Americans. Sanctuary activists of the 1980s therefore not only supported Central Americans who had come to the United States but also sent delegations to threatened communities in Central America, reasoning that having an international presence in threatened communities could provide a measure of safety. Sanctuary workers referred to such work as *accompaniment*, seeking to extend sanctuary to those who had not yet fled. Accompaniment required a deep commitment in that it exposed sanctuary workers, to a limited degree, to spaces of illegality and persecution where refugees were located. Thus, activists who brought Central Americans across the United States–Mexico border, housed them, and transported them to places of safety risked becoming “illegal” or “criminal” themselves, though clearly the consequences of criminalization were not as severe for US workers as for Central American asylum seekers. Likewise, sanctuary activists who traveled to Central America felt that they were putting their bodies on the line, though Central American activists ran higher risks and often paid higher prices (Coutin 1993). In addition, movement members helped Central Americans navigate the US detention system. Some participants took out mortgages on their homes to raise money to bond Central Americans out of detention, while others served as guardians so that detained children could be released.

The dilemmas experienced by 1980s sanctuary activists may be instructive to immigrant rights advocates today. One key area of disagreement was whether to form a national structure in order to better coordinate sanctuary work or to remain a loosely knit coalition of diverse congregations, each of which was free to develop its own approach. Similar debates have arisen today among student activists who are sometimes suspicious of hierarchical organizational structures or the limitations of being a nonprofit (Nicholls 2013). Sanctuary activists of the 1980s also generally distinguished Central American refugees from what movement participants considered to be economic immigrants from other countries. They therefore argued that under both US and international law, those fleeing persecution had legal rights to asylum that other immigrants did not enjoy. Activists debated whether Central Americans who were fleeing the guerrilla forces were as deserving of sanctuary as those fleeing death squads and the military. From a humanitarian standpoint, each might be at risk, but some argued that helping the former undercut the movement's political goals. Some congregations limited sanctuary offers to refugees who were willing to give public testimonies, arguing that such talks publicized stories that the US government sought to hide. If sanctuary were not public, they reasoned, then it would only be a Band-Aid on the wounds of war and would not address root causes. Other congregations, in contrast, contended that it was unethical to require persecution

victims to speak publicly and that assistance should be driven by need rather than politics. Finally, Central American organizers played key roles in mobilizing US religious activists, but US activists often had greater resources than their Central American counterparts. Some Central Americans resented the pejorative connotations of the term “refugee.” One Salvadoran participant recalled, “I used to go around and they would look at me, the exotic refugee, and say, ‘Wow! You have two legs just like white people and you walk just like white people!’” (Coutin 1993, 120).

Despite these dilemmas, 1980s work has had important legacies. The 1990 Immigration Act created Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and designated Salvadorans as the first recipients. Since that time, TPS has been an important temporary immigration remedy for individuals whose countries have suffered a civil conflict or natural disaster. As of April 2018, more than three hundred thousand individuals from ten different countries held this status, though the Trump administration has been rescinding countries’ TPS designations (National Immigration Forum 2018). Also, after sanctuary activists were put on trial for conspiracy and alien smuggling in 1986, movement members sued the federal government for discriminating against Central Americans in the asylum process. This case, known as “American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh,” or “ABC,” was settled out of court in 1991, creating special rules for these asylum applicants. Then, after 1996 legal reforms threatened Central Americans’ abilities to remain in the United States, Congress passed the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA), which created a process for ABC class members to become lawful permanent residents. Later, in 2012, when student activists successfully pressured President Obama to create DACA, TPS served as a template for establishing this new program. Solidarity workers who were involved in 1980s sanctuary work went on to other organizations and initiatives, such as providing water or medical assistance to border crossers. Some 1980s sanctuary congregations are once again opening their doors to individuals at risk of deportation (Southside Presbyterian Church n.d.)

Post-War Migration and Continued Exclusion

In 2018, US Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that all unauthorized border crossers would be federally prosecuted and that domestic violence and gang violence generally would no longer be considered grounds for awarding asylum. These sound like reversals of US policy, but in fact, for those who have been analyzing asylum since the 1980s, there is significant continuity between these policies and decades of excluding Central American asylum seekers from the human rights protections afforded by US and international law. While on its surface asylum law is politically neutral, in reality, concerns about admitting

asylees from nearby countries and from regimes that the United States supports have led to disparate outcomes for citizens of these nations.

During the post-war years, violence in Central American countries shifted from war to gangs and crime. Continued violence is due to multiple factors: impunity granted to perpetrators of abuses, an abundance of weapons, corruption, income inequality, the trauma of the war years, the rise of drug cartels, and US. deportation policies, which sent US-based gang members to Central American countries (Beltrán 2017). Central American families—particularly in the Northern triangle of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—experienced extreme insecurity including forcible recruitment, extortion, sexual violence, assault, and murder. Yet, just as during the war years, the US government has argued that the violence experienced by Central Americans is generally not grounds for political asylum. For example, in a 2008 Board of Immigration Appeals decision, three Salvadoran youths who had been beaten, harassed, and threatened with death and rape for refusing to join the MS-13 gang were denied asylum, even though another youth in their neighborhood who had also refused to join was shot and killed, and despite evidence of similar practices throughout the country (*Matter of S-E-G- 2008*).

As asylum continued to be restrictive, immigrants in the United States underwent criminalization that increased their risk of deportation. Immigration reforms adopted in 1996 expanded the range of criminal convictions that brought immigration consequences, restricted avenues for legalization, and made detention mandatory for many (Morawetz 2000). Secure Communities and related programs increased collaboration between police, prisons, and immigration authorities, with the result that, for noncitizens, coming in contact with the criminal justice system could result in removal (Chacón 2012). Prosecution of immigration violations escalated to the point that these now comprise a significant portion of the federal docket (Gramlich and Bialik 2017). Individuals who were basically from the United States and who may even have acquired lawful permanent residency were being removed permanently, resulting in devastating family separations.

Current policies toward Central Americans continue this history of criminalization and asylum denials by defining the violence that is part of everyday lives as outside the boundaries of protection. President Trump has repeatedly associated Central Americans with crime and gangs, for example, referring to their homelands as “shithole countries” (Bonner 2018) and associating MS-13 with all who enter the country without authorization, even though criminologists have consistently found that the foreign born commit fewer crimes on average than do those born in the United States (Ousey and Kubrin 2009). Advocates successfully made the legal case for domestic violence and gang violence as a basis for asylum, but even before Sessions overruled these rationales, such cases were very

difficult to win, with 75 to 80 percent of such claims being denied (Morrissey 2018). A key impact of Sessions's opinion rejecting domestic and gang violence as grounds for asylum is that asylum seekers will not pass credible fear interviews and therefore will be unable to submit their claims. Furthermore, the TPS that had been issued to Salvadorans and Hondurans in the wake of natural disasters has been rescinded despite ongoing violence in Honduras and El Salvador.

Likewise, the family separations that have garnered attention since the Trump administration adopted a zero tolerance policy on unauthorized border crossings are not new. Central American and other immigrant families have been undergoing separations due to restricted legalization opportunities, inability to travel legally, deportation, and prosecution. Current separations of parents and children are a particularly cruel manifestation of the lack of respect for the principle of family unity.

1980s Sanctuary Practices and Solidarity Work Today

The 1980s sanctuary movement declined during the 1990s as peace accords were signed in El Salvador and Guatemala, but the US government's continued failure to observe the rights of immigrants, asylum seekers, and travelers has given rise to new challenges and new forms of activism. A key challenge is that the securitization of immigration law has vilified immigrants, depicting them as potential terrorists, criminals, and security risks (Menjívar 2014). The administration of US immigration policy moved from the Department of Labor, where it was originally housed, to the Department of Justice and now to the Department of Homeland Security. Immigration reforms that were adopted in 1996 broadened the range of criminal convictions that have immigration consequences, restricted opportunities for legalization, and expanded funding for enforcement (Morawetz 2000; Kanstroom 2007). The federal government has promoted partnerships with prison officials and local police agencies in order to detain noncitizens who come into contact with law enforcement, even for minor infractions such as traffic tickets. Immigration forms now have pages of security-related questions, such as "Have you EVER advocated (either directly or indirectly) the overthrow of any government by force or violence?" (US Citizenship and Immigration Services, 12); "Did you EVER recruit(ask), enlist (sign up), conscript (require), or use any person under 15 years of age to serve in or help an armed force or group?" (14); and "Have you EVER . . . Been a habitual drunkard?" (15). The overpolicing of communities of color has exacerbated the criminalization of immigrants.

Immigrant rights activists have sought to counter this sort of vilification through narratives of deservingness. For instance, Pedro, an LA-based student activist whom I interviewed in 2010, argued that sharing personal narrative was

a way to overcome the divisiveness of immigration debates and the limitations of categories such as “illegal alien.” When asked for an example of such a narrative, Pedro replied:

I would say something like, “My name is Pedro, my family came here in search of a better life because we had a dream and our dream was for us to—for me to have a better education. And right now I’m going to college, and I work hard, and my family has sacrificed so much, and we’re just as American as anybody else. And so we want an opportunity to be successful so that—I want an opportunity to be successful so I can give back. And maybe I didn’t come here with the right documents, but I have the right values. Ah, my mom has taught me the value of hard-work. She works at a hotel, um, every day. And so she’s given back to this country. She’s paying taxes. And so I think you ought just—I just want an opportunity to succeed and also give back to my community that I love, and give back to this country that I love and that has given me so much.”

Pedro’s narrative defines belonging as a matter of exhibiting “American values”—sacrifice, love of country, contributing to the common good, hard work, seeking opportunity—rather than having the right papers. He thus articulates the “Dreamer” narrative that has fueled the immigrant youth movement and that President Obama also indirectly invoked by referring to “felons, not families” as the group that should be deported. Such narratives of student success can also draw an implied contrast with youths who drop out of high school, join gangs, or acquire criminal records, suggesting that the latter are undeserving. As a gang violence prevention worker complained to me during a 2007 interview, “Like in these recent marches, the immigrant campaign for legalization was divided. ‘Do we stand up for the clean-cut immigrant? Or also for the criminal who is part of our community?’ And they largely decided to stand up for the clean-cut immigrant.”

Some student activists have rejected narratives that distinguish between deserving and undeserving immigrants. For example, Carla, a student leader interviewed in 2016, referred to this distinction as an example of “respectability politics,”² noting that the “good immigrant” narrative bases deservingness in characteristics associated with white, heterosexual, middle-class society (see Keyes 2011; Vargas 1997). She explained,

‘Respectability politics’ is wanting everyone in your group to be good so that those outside can say, ‘Oh, they are so good that I am going to give them this, because they are so similar to us’—and blah, blah, blah. While more radical activism says, ‘Yes, we are different. We have different ideals. That doesn’t matter. We have these ideals and we are going to follow what we want and you have to give us our rights even though we are anti-patriotic, though we are LGBT, though we are single

mothers. That is, we don't have to be . . . the perfect people in a white family. We are different and just the same, we deserve our rights.

Likewise, another student activist, Reese, argued “What I would like to see is mainly just like move away from the Dream Act narrative. And instead talk a lot more about undocumented workers, undocumented parents, LGBTQ immigrants, um, even like undocumented Black immigrants because nobody ever, ever talks about them, and they do exist.” Through these comments, Carla and Reese reject what they see as exclusionary definitions of deservingness and instead embrace groups, such as single mothers or LGBTQ immigrants, that deviate from white, patriarchal, heterosexual norms. Reese extended inclusion to criminals.

Ending the repeated exclusion of Central American asylum seekers would require bringing asylum policies into alignment with the forms of violence that actually occur on a regular basis in the communities that these individuals are fleeing and then zealously enforcing these protections. Doing so would promote family integrity, support human rights, and alter the dynamics of the historic relationship between the United States and Central American nations.

Conclusion

This short discussion of 1980s sanctuary practices raises several questions for further reflection. First, to what degree can current sanctuary and solidarity work transcend borders? It is important to reconnect migrants and deportees to their families, communities, and histories, and to challenge transborder enforcement initiatives and neocolonial relationships by creating ties with affected communities. Second, can activists devise alternatives to state-based categories of membership? Reese, one of the student activists quoted above, argued that the immigrant rights movement should not only focus on securing a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented but also on attaining social equity so that all would enjoy rights. She explained, “This isn't just for immigrants, you know. It's for . . . all communities of color, that everybody has . . . fair access to education, housing, employment.” Reese saw true inclusion as overcoming not only the boundaries between citizens and the undocumented but also between dominant society and other historically marginalized groups. Third, what would it mean for allies and institutions to adopt the principle of accompaniment today? In current activist circles, expressions of solidarity sometimes take the form of transcending difference by claiming, for example, “We are all _____,” and then listing the name or location of the victim of a tragedy. Also, at immigrant rights rallies and marches, participants have expressed solidarity with each other, regardless of legal status (see figure 2.1). Applying a principle of accompaniment



Figure 2.1. “Protect each other: unafraid” sign at September 2017 rally in Santa Ana, California, protesting President Trump’s rescission of the Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Photo by Susan Coutin.

in a university setting could mean enabling everyone to attend college regardless of legal status and financial resources as well as taking on something of the condition of illegality experienced by those who are undocumented.

Exploring the contemporary implications of 1980s sanctuary practices reveals the historical embeddedness of forms of resistance as well as the hidden legacies of earlier historical moments. Current activism deploys previously devised tactics in innovative ways (Tilly 2006), such as adapting the notion of “sanctuary” to policies governing interaction between local police and federal authorities (Ridgley 2008). In so doing, earlier forms of resistance are brought forward in time (Coutin 2011) in ways that challenge political violence, complicity, and the denial of rights and humanity. Also, current policy achievements may bear traces of earlier moments of resistance. Uncovering these legacies is a means of revealing hidden, long-term contributions of earlier struggles as well as the circuitous paths that successes sometimes take. Knowledge of such histories reveals that activism can bear fruit in unforeseen ways and suggests alternatives to current political realities. In particular, it helps to create spaces and temporalities in which membership is already achieved and divisions based on nationality, immigration status, or geographic location have the potential to

be transcended. These alternate spaces and temporalities are key to acknowledging US colonial and imperial relationships and to imagining another, more just, world.

NOTES

- 1 My analysis of sanctuary practices derives from my experience doing research about and volunteering with sanctuary- and community-based immigrant rights groups over more than three decades. As a doctoral student in the 1980s, I began my research career writing about the US sanctuary movement. From 1986 to 1988, I participated in sanctuary activities in Tucson, Arizona, and in the San Francisco East Bay. I attended church services, meetings, and rallies, helped to document asylum claims, translated at public events, did volunteer tasks, collected news articles about the movement, studied the transcripts of the 1986 Tucson sanctuary trial, and interviewed more than one hundred movement participants. During the 1990s, I continued to study political and legal advocacy regarding Central American immigrants, this time by working with Central American community groups in Los Angeles. In the 2000s, I built on this earlier work through a study of the significance of the Salvadoran immigrant population for both El Salvador and the United States, and I also carried out research regarding the experiences of 1.5 generation immigrants who were born in El Salvador and raised in the United States. My current research, in the 2010s, has focused on the roles that documents of various sorts play in immigrants' legal cases and also on the forms of executive relief—such as DACA—created by the Obama administration. Throughout all of these projects, I've straddled the line between being a researcher who produces academic work and an activist/volunteer who is affiliated with movements and organizations.
- 2 Carla may be drawing on the work of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993).

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“A Cartel Built for Love”

“Medellín,” Pablo Escobar, and the Scripts of Global Colombianidad

MARÍA ELENA CEPEDA

“Please give me all of your books on the life of Pablo Escobar and the history of that time period in Medellín.” My request to the book clerk at the Librería Nacional in Medellín’s upscale Poblado district was simple, yet I was quite torn about it. My accent betrayed the fact that I am not *paisa*,¹ or a native of the Antioquia department where Medellín, Colombia’s second-largest city, is located. I wondered if the store clerk thought of me as yet another troublesome rubbernecker, an outsider fascinated by the city’s violent recent past and its most famous local son, the alternatively adored and reviled Pablo Escobar, dead since 1993 yet still alive in the global and local popular imaginations. Unfailingly polite, the tall, well-postured Afro-Colombian man in his late thirties released a low sigh and dutifully headed off to the back of the store. I felt rather guilty; it is, after all, quite taxing to be endlessly connected to a virulent set of stereotypes regarding masculinist violence, drug trafficking, corruption, intergenerational trauma, and forced displacement.

This chapter frames these stereotypes—or ideas about Colombia, Medellín, and Pablo Escobar—as cultural narratives that, along with US interventionism and Colombia’s potent regionalism, inform the performances of current Colombian stars such as Maluma and broader social scripts about global Colombianidad. In this context, “global Colombianidad” references the regimes of representation that encompass Colombian subjects, including those in the diaspora. The essay discusses the ongoing effects of Colombia’s more than fifty-year civil conflict² on the development of Medellín, focusing on the narratives around Pablo Escobar and their impact on local and global understandings of the city. It also underscores the centrality of Colombian regionalism and racialized spaces on popular scripts of Colombian identities. Finally, in order to illustrate the centrality of these imposed and organic metanarratives on external conceptualizations of global Colombianidad, I conduct a textual analysis of the 2019 music video “Medellín,” a recent collaboration between US performer Madonna and Medellín native and reggaetón superstar Maluma. By deconstructing “Medellín,” I demonstrate the ways in which popular cultural scripts about regional identities reverberate globally. More specifically, I argue that we must read global

Colombianidad through the lenses of racialized regionalism and heteropatriarchy, frameworks that deeply inform the ways in which all Colombians are represented, from both within the community as well as from without. The salience of Maluma's localized paisa identity and its impacts on our understanding of Colombian identities reminds us that within the nation and among its diaspora, Colombianidad remains hotly contested. As such, "the concept of one Colombian nation or a national Colombian identity remains, for most, elusive," and as the example of "Medellín" highlights, is most often presented in global media from the perspective of those on the outside looking in (Fanta Castro, Herrero-Olaizola, and Rutter-Jensen, 2017, 2).

US Interventionism in Colombia: Localized Impacts

For over fifty years, Colombia has been engaged in a protracted civil war, the longest of any nation in the Western hemisphere. Since the 1990s, Colombia has also held the dubious distinction of being the most violent country in the region, with the worst human rights record, the highest number of murdered trade unionists, and the world's largest population of internal refugees. On November 24, 2016, the country signed an official peace agreement.³ While generalized violence has abated since its signing, targeted assassinations—specifically of social leaders and human rights activists—have increased, rendering it impossible to speak yet of a "post-conflict" Colombia. Both of the two most prominent warring factions in Colombia's dirty war, the various guerrilla groups and paramilitary forces, have committed grave human rights violations. Yet notably, since their emergence as US-trained counterinsurgency forces in the 1960s, solely the paramilitary forces have enjoyed intimate ties to the Colombian ruling establishment and are responsible for approximately 80 percent of all human rights violations.⁴ This is particularly true in the case of Antioquia and Medellín (Baca and Jiménez 2018; Dyer 2019; Hristov 2009), where the more generalized violence of recent years continues to reverberate in ways that reflect the profound influence of US interventionism. One prominent example is Plan Colombia (2000–2015), a US-backed, ten-billion-dollar counternarcotics initiative first championed by the governments of Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002) and Bill Clinton (1993–2001). Under Plan Colombia, US taxpayers funded the mass aerial fumigation of coca crops in Colombia, a strategy that was ultimately halted due to widespread reports of communal displacement, serious health concerns, and the damage of food crops. Plan Colombia also enabled the Colombian government to siphon money to paramilitary death squads responsible for many of the era's most egregious human rights violations under the guise of counterinsurgency efforts. President Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2018) ended the program in 2015 due to its devastating health and environmental effects. However, under pressure of decertification by the Trump government,⁵ by October 2018 the Iván Duque

administration (2018–) had initiated a pilot program of aerial fumigation in Antioquia, a long-standing seat of paramilitary power (King and Wherry 2018).

By fall 2019, resistance against the Duque administration and its policies reached an apex. Following mass protests in other parts of South America, a diverse array of Colombians took to the streets on November 21, 2019, for the first in a series of national strikes that quickly became violent. Protesters contested Duque's refusal to implement the 2016 peace accords, potential new austerity measures, and the ongoing violence perpetuated by the armed forces, among other issues. The protests resulted in four deaths, including that of eighteen-year-old Dilan Cruz at the hands of ESMAD riot police, a tragedy that became a rallying point for protestors. Protests quickly spread across the country, including to major industrial centers such as Medellín.

Since Pablo Escobar's spectacular 1993 death on a Medellín rooftop, the city has witnessed not the end of its narco-capital status but a "fusion of politics, property and organized crime, reflected in the paramilitary grip over security for capital investment [that] links the city's bad old days to its good new ones, and largely determines the present and future shape of the built environment" (Hylton 2008, 83, 85). Under Escobar, Medellín emerged as the homicide capital of the world; between 1982 and 2002, more than seventy thousand were murdered in the city, mostly young men. Tied to the presence of paramilitary groups in the region, Medellín's violence was indelibly marked by Cold War counterinsurgency tactics designed to "clean up" the city (Hylton 2008, 38). Medellín's current housing and construction boom—indeed, its self-styled rebirth as the "best corner of the Americas" (Hylton 2008, 41)—would not be possible without the massive influx of cocaine capital. Currently awash in conspicuous consumption, Medellín has not left behind the cutting inequality of its past, yet it has still undergone a major makeover not unnoticed by the world press or the Latin music industry. Medellín's series of "cosmetic operations" enabled the traditionally conservative city to emerge by 2007 as more of a boomtown than Los Angeles and New York combined. Remarkably, by 2008 the murder rate in the city had decreased six-fold, lower than the homicide rates of Detroit, Washington, DC, and Baltimore (Hylton 2008, 71–72).

Tracing the Pablo Escobar Narrative: Local and Global Readings

The memory of Medellín native Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria (1949–1993) constitutes "a painful wound in the Colombian psyche," given its intimate association with violence, corruption, and terrorism (Pobutsky 2017, 282). His myth is also a source of considerable dispute, or a "living construct, a crossroad of ideologies navigated and fueled by conflicting interests" (Pobutsky 2017, 287). Much like the civil war that officially raged in Colombia for more than half a century, Escobar's myth is mired in discord. Alternatively cast as a social bandit or as a criminal,

Escobar is also read by some as a visionary master of global economics or as a scapegoat unjustly castigated in what essentially amounted to a “national orgy of greed and power” (Pobutsky 2017, 283–84).

Nearly thirty years after his death at the hands of Colombian federal agents, the tension surrounding Escobar’s life testifies to the enduring power of regimes of representation. In what she refers to as Escobar’s “cultural renaissance,” Aldona Bialowas Pobutsky demonstrates how Escobar looms large in popular outlaw folklore, a genre defined by tabloid-style writing and characterized above all by sensational anecdotes. Fans of popular outlaw folklore, hungry for an unvarnished glimpse of the “authentic” Pablo, eagerly consume the products detailing his every habit and idiosyncrasy, humanizing him in the process. Rather than examining Escobar’s societal impact, his drug empire and actions, such outlaw folklore aims to recast the past from a “personal” angle steeped in equal parts fiction and personalization. In this regard, the specter of Pablo Escobar as past and present media spectacle haunts the Colombian popular imagination as much as it shapes global conceptualizations of Colombianidad (Pobutsky 2013, 684–685). The hypermasculine, regionally inflected musical production of local artists such as Maluma reanimates the Escobar narrative for the global reggaetón stage and beyond.

The Paisa Reggaetón Machine: Interrogating the Myth of Regionalized Whiteness

Not even born until the year after Escobar’s death, Maluma is still inextricably tied to the ever-present Pablo Escobar national narrative of the 1980s and 1990s. Informed by the discursive stylings of a heavily commodified magical realism as well as a “dirty realism” (Herrero-Olaizola 2007, 43–44), the culture industry built around the Escobar narrative constitutes a source of distress and resentment for many Colombians. Simultaneously, the endless accumulation of tell-all books, films, games, and television series simultaneously provide a significant source of capital for many. These are mediated reiterations of the masculinist violence that has defined contemporary Colombian history (Anderson 2018; Cepeda 2010; Cepeda 2018; Herrero-Olaizola 2007; Ochoa Camacho 2016; Pobutsky 2013; Pobutsky 2017). Escobar’s hometown of Medellín has emerged as a protagonist in and of itself in a transnational culture industry that monetizes the pain and marginalization of an entire nation and its diaspora. Maluma’s performances of Colombianidad not only reference the Escobar narrative in a manner that benefits him monetarily; they also reinscribe the heteropatriarchal underpinnings and ethnoracial dynamics of much of the contemporary reggaetón scene.

Among the ongoing developments within the global reggaetón industry, including its emergent Medellín-based branch, figures the widely critiqued “whitening” of the genre, a move that goes hand in hand with the music’s

globalization.⁶ This whitening expresses itself most notably in the ethnoracial makeup of the reggaetón’s most visible performers as well as in the language favored by those same individuals. Significantly, Rivera-Rideau reminds us that despite its firm grounding in Puerto Rico and more recently in Medellín, we must understand reggaetón as simultaneously local *and* global. As she maintains, it has been “routed” through specific geographic locales that are in turn “rooted” in local communities possessing their own singular understandings of race, class, gender, and national identity (Rivera-Rideau 2015, 16). Some of these specific local articulations are voiced in the Medellín context by recent noteworthy migrants to the Medellín music scene such as Puerto Rican reggaetón star Nicky Jam, who moved to the city in 2007 to reignite his career. As he has stated in interviews, Nicky Jam ties Colombian reggaetón’s success (versus that of Puerto Rico) to its greater reliance on “everyday” lyrics (Katz 2017; Moreno 2016) or the ostensibly less localized (and differentially racialized) speech of the Hispanic Caribbean. I would affirm that this linguistic shift in reggaetón’s specific racialization, which features a subjectively more “global” variety of Spanish—or the hegemonic accent and lexicon of the South American Andes—rests on the logic that certain varieties of Spanish are inherently superior and more “neutral,” “international,” (Uribe Yepes 2018; Caramanica 2017) and unmarked than others, an assessment that can also be applied by extension to the speakers of those particular types of Spanish. This example of the neutralization or much-critiqued whitening of reggaetón portends an aesthetic deracination of the music and its performers, one that is pointedly rooted in the erasure of Blackness and that can be traced in large part to dominant US readings of Latina/o/x racial identity as well as localized understandings of race.⁷ This is significant, as since its origins, the Afro-Caribbean genre has been noted for its critique of racism and more specifically anti-Blackness (Rivera-Rideau and Torres-Leschnik 2019, 89). I would argue, moreover, that the intensified movement away from Blackness under the hegemony of the Medellín reggaetón industry is no accident, given the long-standing discourse around whiteness in Antioquia.

As in much of the Americas, regionalist discourse in Colombia has historically been framed in oppositional terms (Appelbaum 2003, 39). For example, natives of the Caribbean coast are stereotypically less inclined toward hard work, whereas inhabitants of the nation’s highlands are “naturally” industrious. These epistemological frameworks span time and space, informing intergenerational and diasporic understandings of Colombianidad. Shaping not only local but ultimately also global constructs of race, gender, nation, and desire, “[i]n Colombia, history gave race a regional structure such that race cannot be simply understood as a social construction around phenotype, but must also be seen as a social construction around region” (Wade 1991, 46). Within this context, the identity of Antioquia highlands natives, such as Maluma, has long been closely associated with civilization, capitalism, labor, and ultimately whiteness (Tubb

2013, 627), a discursive correlation notably present in local narratives about the late Pablo Escobar. Within Colombia, the *raza antioqueña* (or the “Antioquian race” of the Antioquia department) has long been considered superior, premised on a supposed mixture of Jew, Creole, and Spaniard and corresponding stereotypes of hardworking, astute, and entrepreneurial populations (Rojas 2002, 30). “The white legend” or the myth of paisa whiteness thus boasts an extensive history born of racialized regionalism, and it is rooted in the profound sense of regional exceptionalism undergirding Antioquia’s racial claims (Appelbaum 2003, 12; Tubb 2013, 633).

Medellín native Maluma references narco-trafficking and Escobar in his music as part of a performance of street credibility and authenticity, two hallmarks of a successful reggaetón persona. While performing a hegemonic Colombianidad through an exaggerated articulation of heterosexual, cisgendered, Andean, urban, affluent masculinity, Maluma embodies the “neutral,” “global” (read: white) face that has increasingly come to characterize contemporary reggaetón. This is part of the driving logic of ethnoracial identity, gender, sexuality, and nation that undergirds collaborations such as that of Madonna and Maluma.

Madonna, Maluma, and the Disparate Performances of Global Colombianidad

Released globally on April 24, 2019, the music video for “Medellín”⁸ represents a move toward a generically pop sound for Maluma, and a key step in his efforts—as well as those of Madonna—toward securing a broader global audience. In the press, Maluma has been open about the impacts of his collaboration with Madonna, describing it as “a huge step for my culture, for Latin culture, it’s very, very big” (Nolfi 2019). His remarks index both local (“my [Colombian/paisa] culture”) and global (“Latin culture”) reverberations of “Medellín,” based not only on album sales but also with respect to an enhanced visibility for Latina/x/o artists on the international stage.⁹ Leah Perry (2016) traces Madonna’s entanglement with Latinidad back to her 1984 video for the hit single “Borderline.” In both “Medellín” and “Borderline,” Madonna styles herself “both as an alluring sex object and as a transgressor of established boundaries” (Kellner, qtd. in Perry, 2016, 2). Her seemingly subversive tactics in “Medellín” constitute a “commodity of diversity as subversion—turning it, and herself, into a product” that has ultimately benefitted Madonna (and, in the case of “Medellín,” Maluma) economically (Perry 2016, 21).

“Medellín” is best read through a polysemic lens or an interpretive approach that foregrounds the potential for multiple, and at times contradictory, readings. Here I am most interested in its performative polysemy, or the manner in which artists produce work that inspires various interpretations on the part of audiences.

In this regard, we might recognize Madonna’s work as a key site of strategic ambiguity¹⁰ or a type of carefully orchestrated polysemy that may result in one audience understanding “Medellín” as a liberatory text grounded in female sexual liberation and antiageism, while another audience might well read it as a flawed script for Latina/o/x–Anglo unification. Here the power resides primarily with the performer, and it is primarily wielded in the service of economic gain for the artist(s).

“Medellín” is rooted in the premise that both Madonna and Maluma have, as the lyrics note, “[taken] a pill and had a dream”—the dream being their May–December romance, as Madonna was sixty years old and Maluma twenty-five at the time of the video’s release. When a similarly clad Maluma joins the dance class and begins consistently interjecting phrases in Spanish, Madonna croons in a smooth Auto-Tuned voice and wakes up in Medellín leading a dance class. A red-light dance sequence marks Maluma and Madonna’s illicit affair, as the pair appears to pursue one another, with Maluma as the teasing masculine aggressor.

The clip’s visuals consistently frame the performers in ethnoracial contradiction to one another. Madonna’s overexposed, radiant white skin visually accentuates her whiteness vis à vis Maluma’s racialized Brown (mestizo) Colombianidad. The ethnoracial visual register in which Maluma may be read confers a Brownness upon him that not only diverges from historic representations of paisa identity within Colombia and among its diaspora but that also departs from the (relative) whiteness conferred upon him in the reggaetón sphere. Maluma capitalizes upon this racial fluidity. As Priscilla Peña Ovalle explains, “Oscillating between the normalcy of whiteness and the exoticism of Blackness, Latinas [and some Latinos/xs] function as in-between bodies to mediate and maintain the status quo. Some . . . can channel this liminality into stardom by maneuvering their in-betweenness toward the more desired racial representation of the period . . . thus maximizing their careers in visual culture” (Ovalle 2011, 7–8). It is through the prism of relative racial fluidity in “Medellín” that Maluma simultaneously signs in for a generic Latinidad, global Colombianidad, and a regionally specific paisa whiteness.

Reclining in an elaborate bed wearing a brilliant blue ball gown, Madonna sips champagne with Maluma in one of the most static scenes of the performance. These moments of relative stillness are juxtaposed against several grainy, less composed shots of the pair sitting on the dance floor in seemingly candid outtakes. Attributing Madonna’s mental “viaje” (“trip”) to an excess of aguardiente or Colombian cane sugar liquor, Maluma declares: “Que estamos en Colombia / Aquí hay rumba en cada esquina.”¹¹ The song’s principal rumba soon materializes, in the form of a carnivalesque outdoor wedding for the unlikely couple. Donning an elaborate white wedding dress reminiscent of the iconic gown she donned for her groundbreaking 1984 “Like a Virgin” video (Camp 2019), a now golden-blond Madonna deliberately parades her way down the length of the wedding banquet table, framed on both sides by enthusiastic revelers.

The bridge that follows constitutes the musical apex of the video, as the tempo increases and the track's volume swells. Maluma and Madonna trade lines against rhythmic claps, while onscreen Madonna continues to sidle down the wedding banquet table, moving toward Maluma at the table's head. Madonna is the prize to be conquered, as Maluma sings: "Si te enamoro . . . En menos de un año, no no / No' vamo', no' vamo' no vamo' pa' Medallo / (Ay qué rico) . . ." ¹² ("Medallo" being the popular local nickname for "Medellín," a lexical choice that confers upon Maluma the status of authentic native son). The married couple blissfully kiss as the colorful partygoers look on, and immediately the scene shifts to grainy black-and-white footage of a satin-robe-clad Madonna fleeing on foot by night as the sound of beating horse hooves fills the air. The tempo of "Medellín" slows once more, as Madonna finally references the industry for which the city is most famous: "We built a cartel just for love / Venus was hovering above us / I took a trip, it set me free / Forgave myself for being me." The equine theme continues as the video's action draws to a close with an overhead shot of Madonna and her young Colombian stallion (the obliging Maluma) on horseback, racing their way across a lush rural landscape at dawn. As we notice throughout this sequence, it is Madonna, and not Maluma, who possesses the power to discursively define their relationship as a "cartel just for love"; Maluma remains mute, an act that references the colonial power to name and ultimately define the racialized Other.

Aside from the presence of Maluma and the inclusion of untranslated Spanish, the video's disparate cultural references—aguardiente, the accordion, local slang, carnival, and general revelry—paint a picture of Colombianidad that would likely pass unrecognized by most non-Colombians, thereby augmenting the text's polysemic character. The "cartel of love" lyric was easily the most widely quoted lyrical element of the single in the weeks immediately following its release, evidence of the Escobar narrative's stubborn legibility in the global popular imagination. The magical, exceptional paisa space to which Maluma pledges to transport Madonna proves an unfulfilled promise to those familiar with the city; for others, the vibrant (if in some ways still deeply troubled) post-Escobar city remains unknown, and in the process "Medellín"'s transgressive potential remains blunted. We are presented with no substantial alternative vision of Medellín or the people who occupy that space. The actual Medellín proves a hollow reference, as the action on display could have taken place in virtually any nameless Latin(a/o/x) American locale. Indeed, the decontextualized nature of the video's imagery and lyrical content permits most non-Colombian viewers the luxury of ignorance regarding the impacts of US interventionism on Medellín, much less on Colombia as a whole. In a globalized media climate, "Medellín" thus highlights the manner in which foundational national narratives such as the contemporary Escobar narrative are scripted from within but also often from without. As the music video for

“Medellín” and Maluma’s participation in it evince, such potent discourses profoundly shape Colombian cultural production and its global reception.

Conclusion: Reading the Scripts of Global Colombianidad

As Lily Cho maintains, “[D]iasporas are not just there. They are not simply collections of people, communities of scattered individuals bound by some shared history, race or religion. Rather, they emerge in relation to power, in the turn to and away from power” (Cho, 2007, 11). We must therefore read Colombianidad through the triumvirate lenses of racialized regionalism, heteropatriarchy, and US interventionism, or the powers that inform Colombian identities in their diasporic iterations as well as within Colombia’s borders.¹³ As we witness in “Medellín,” Madonna serves as a proxy for an unexamined historic US interventionism whose impacts are felt at multiple levels of Colombian society, among its diaspora, and in its global representations. Located at the center of a vibrant Medellín reggaetón industry that may also be interpreted in analogous terms, in “Medellín” Maluma proves a secondary figure who nonetheless embodies the privileges attached to the interlocking forces of heteropatriarchy and racialized Colombian regionalism in particular. When assessed superficially, the burgeoning Medellín reggaetón industry and the global success of performers such as Maluma appear to offer a positive counterdiscourse to the Pablo Escobar narrative and the long-term impacts of US interventionism on the city and Colombia as a whole. Yet on second glance, neither Medellín as a space nor its emergent music industry provide a meaningful departure from the masculinist violence that has permeated the country prior to and after the 2016 peace accords. Rather, Madonna and Maluma’s “Medellín” offers yet one more potent example of how media discourses such as the Escobar narrative act not only as marketing forces in and of themselves but also as epistemological disciplinary mechanisms that regulate the seemingly immutable scripts of contemporary global Colombianidad.

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NOTES

- 1 I distinguish here between the Colombian understanding of the “paisa” label from its usage in the Mexican context, in which it denotes a Northern Mexican regional identity. Moreover, for many Mexicans “paisa” is also a class-based term that negatively marks individuals

- as working class. For an excellent analysis of the role of paisa identity, diasporic feminisms, and popular music, see Yessica Garcia-Hernández (2016).
- 2 For further information on the history of Colombia and its long-standing internal conflict, see Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Marco Palacios, and Ana María Gómez López (2017); LaRosa and Mejía (2017); and Palacios (2006).
 - 3 A history of the Colombian peace process and its potential outcomes can be found in LaRosa and Mejía (2017).
 - 4 This translates into nearly fifteen thousand civilian deaths at the hands of paramilitary groups at the height of the violence between 1988 and 2003. By 2009, the number of political murders in Colombia has exceeded those of any overt Latin American dictatorship (Hristov 2009).
 - 5 In 2017, the Trump government threatened to decertify Colombia, effectively placing the country on a blacklist of nations not deemed to be combatting the global drug trade effectively enough. Under decertification, a country forfeits all US foreign aid not directly tied to antinarcotics measures. In the case of Colombia, this would entail ceasing all aid related to the 2016 peace accords. The Trump administration has also supported a return to aerial fumigation and forced eradication such as deployed under Plan Colombia, despite their well-documented negative impacts.
 - 6 Concurrent with this trajectory is reggaetón's increasing stress on more overtly misogynist, heteronormative lyrical and visual content. Notably, it was the genre's "obscene" material that threatened its commercial viability and circulation during its early years in Puerto Rico. Yet this tendency to rely on markedly heteronormative, masculinist content has only grown with the genre's global commercialization, a fact that Marshall sharply notes as "consistent with mainstream American culture" in its reliance on "macho fantasies about sex" that leaned toward the pornographic and that ultimately reinforced well-worn stereotypes about "hot" Latinas/os/xs (Marshall 2009, 49).
 - 7 For a cogent analysis of the impact of Latina/o/x localized readings of race on musical production and reception, see Michelle M. Rivera (2017).
 - 8 "Medellín" was written by Maluma and Madonna and produced by Frenchman Mirwais Ahmadzaï, a previous Madonna collaborator. Shot on location in Portugal, the video was directed by Spaniards Diana Kunst and multidisciplinary artist Mau Morgó.
 - 9 According to this logic, regardless of a Latina/o/x/ artists' success in Spanish, the opportunity to record in English confers greater prestige (Cepeda 2010).
 - 10 For a nuanced analysis of the dynamics of gender, race, and strategic ambiguity in contemporary media, see Ralina L. Joseph (2018).
 - 11 "We're in Colombia / Here there's a party on every corner."
 - 12 "If I make you fall in love with me . . . / In less than one year / We're goin', we're goin', we're goin' to Medallo / (Oh how delicious) . . ."
 - 13 For a discussion of Maluma and the dynamics of heteropatriarchy in the current global reggaetón industry, see Cepeda (2019).

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Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III

Settler Colonialism and Nonnative People of Color

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This is an edited version of a “Progress Report” on Race and Ethnicity published in *Progress in Human Geography*. I conceived of it in 2015 in order to better understand Chicana/x’s complex subjectivity as immigrants, settlers, and colonized people within the context of Spanish and U.S. imperialism. The literature has since developed significantly and the essay should be read as an early contribution. I have also maintained the term, “Chicana/o,” which was customary at the time.

Introduction

In this progress report I consider the politics of settler colonialism in relation to nonnative people of color. Over the past decade the concept of settler colonialism, a distinct form of colonization, has become increasingly prominent (Trask, 2000; Wolfe, 2006). Rather than seeking to control land, resources, and labor, settler colonization eliminated native peoples in order to appropriate their land. The United States, Canada, Israel, and Australia are all examples of settler states. Early theorizations focused on white settlers, but questions soon arose from ethnic studies scholars regarding the role of nonwhite peoples. Though global conversations (Lawrence and Dua, 2005; Sharma and Wright, 2008/9), I focus on U.S. ethnic and native studies debates (Byrd, 2011; Tuck and Yang, 2012), as I am concerned with Chicana/o studies’ response. While both Asian American and Black studies scholars have contributed to this discussion, Chicana/o studies has been relatively silent. And, for very different reasons, so has geography.

Chicana/o studies’ ambivalence, I argue, is due to settler colonialism’s potential to disrupt core elements of Chicana/o political subjectivity. Specifically, it unsettles Chicanas/os’ conception of themselves as colonized people by highlighting their role as colonizers. Acknowledging such a role is difficult not only because it challenges key dimensions of Chicana/o identity, as seen in Aztlán,

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Chicanas/os' mythical homeland, but also because of the precarious nature of Chicana/o Indigeneity.

Geography, with a few exceptions (Kobayashi and De Leeuw, 2010; Bauder, 2011), has only considered whites in relation to settler colonialism (Bonds and Inwood, 2015; Radcliffe, 2015). This reflects geography's larger anti-racist scholarship—anchored in a white/nonwhite binary. This, in turn, reflects the overwhelming whiteness of the discipline. Geography simply lacks the racial diversity, scholarly expertise, and comfort to explore such questions.

Despite their differences, I wish to place these two disciplines in conversation. Besides being my intellectual homes, geography must learn to wrestle with the complexities of racial and (de)colonial dynamics. Its contributions to the study of racism will always be limited if the fullness of the racial landscape is overlooked. Chicana/o studies' avoidance of settler colonialism illustrates how racial and political subjectivity is structured by colonization, nation-states, white supremacy, anti-racist struggle, and decolonial projects. Deciphering the historical reasons why Chicana/o studies has failed to grapple with settler colonialism illuminates the deeply geographical nature of racial and political subjectivity. Ethnic-Mexicans, like all people of color, are diverse and multifaceted (contrary to the tidiness implied by "Latina/o"), and it is only through exploring the spatialities of their historical experiences that we can understand this avoidance.

In this report I first introduce settler colonialism and ethnic studies' response to it. Then, drawing primarily on cultural studies scholarship, I explore the precarious nature of Chicana/o Indigeneity and the significance of Aztlán, both of which are deeply geographic. Chicana/o Indigeneity is embedded in questions of scale, territory, boundaries, and empire, while Aztlán is an imagined place. Although I focus on U.S. ethnic studies, these issues should resonate in all settler societies.

Settler Colonialism, Native Peoples, and Nonwhite Others

What makes settler societies unique is their desire to *replace* Indigenous peoples in order to take their land, rather than simply control resources and labor.¹ While the U.S. acknowledges it is a settler society, it does so by evacuating the violence associated with this process. Political scientist Samuel Huntington, a foe of Latina/o immigration, distinguishes settlers from immigrants. He states that settlers came to *build* a country, while immigrants come to *join* it (2004). While settlers are routinely admired in U.S. culture, their celebration requires imagining the process as nonviolent or, at best, involving justifiable violence (Blackhawk, 2006). Key to erasing this violence are transition narratives—discourses that serve to make the past more palatable. Foregrounding settler colonialism, however, highlights the whitewashing associated with hegemonic representations of colonization (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) and re-centers native peoples.

Settler colonialism demands that the experience of Indigenous peoples be taken seriously, which has profound implications for white settlers, immigrants, and various minoritized populations, which in the United States includes African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, Muslims, and other racially subordinated groups. As Indigenous studies scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson notes, “the question of how anyone came to be white or Black in the United States is inextricably tied to the dispossession of the original owners” (2008: 84).

While many routinely collapse native and ethnic studies, there are important distinctions. First, many in native studies reject the category “minority” and the larger politics of multiculturalism (Byrd, 2011; Kobayashi and De Leeuw, 2010). This is because U.S. minority status usually results from racism, but Indigenous peoples have been colonized. And while the United States has been somewhat willing to acknowledge a racist past, it has refused to grapple with the violence of settler colonialism. Though settler colonization is a racial project (Wolfe, 2016), it cannot be reduced to racism. Indeed, the solution to racism is inclusion, but this does not address colonization (Coulthard, 2014). “When the remediation of the colonization of American Indians is framed through discourses of racialization that can be redressed by further inclusion into the nation-state, there is a significant failure to grapple with the fact that such discourses further reinscribe the original colonial injury” (Byrd, 2011: xxiii).

Theorizing how minoritized groups participate in settler colonialism is challenging (Trask, 2000; Kobayashi and De Leeuw, 2010; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Byrd, 2011; Saranillo, 2013; Sharma and Wright, 2008/9). Though some conceptualize all nonnatives as settlers (Lawrence and Dua, 2005), ethnic studies generally rejects such simple framings. Terms like “arrivant” and “subordinate settler” describe various minoritized positions. Theorizing the roles of Black slaves, Asian immigrants, and Mexican settlers can be discomfiting, which, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, critical education writers, maintain, is entirely appropriate (2012). They argue that since the United States is both a settler colonial nation-state *and* an empire, it displaces native peoples and compels others onto indigenous lands through slavery, war, and economic dislocation (2012: 7). In an effort to overcome the seeming binary between colonization and racism, feminist scholars Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright (2008/9) interpret colonization as the commons, which foregrounds capitalism rather than nationalism, and offers one way forward. Feminist and native studies scholar Andrea Smith has sought to unify these processes under white supremacy, arguing that it is underlain by three logics: slaveability, genocide, and orientalism. Each logic in turn enables a particular social relation: capitalism, colonization, and war, respectively. These logics preclude easy solidarity. Smith writes:

[A]ll non-Native peoples are promised the ability to . . . settl[e] indigenous lands.
All non-Black peoples are promised that . . . they will not be at the bottom of the

racial hierarchy. And Black and Native peoples are promised that they will advance economically and politically if they join U.S. wars (Smith, 2012: 70).

Black studies scholars have responded in diverse ways to these debates. Historian Tiya Miles (2005) explored how Black and Indigenous peoples intersected through white supremacy, slavery, and settler colonization, while challenging conventional ideas of temporality. Instead of assuming slavery followed native dispossession, she shows how they informed each other simultaneously. Other African American studies scholars, often associated with “Afro-pessimism,” have rejected relational interpretations and their concomitant politics, as they see global anti-Blackness as immutable (Wilderson, 2010; see also Kauanui, 2017).

Asian American studies has focused on immigrants’ role in colonizing Hawai’i, especially how Asian “success” promotes multicultural harmony. “In their focus on racism, discrimination, and the exclusion of Asians . . . such studies tell the story of Asians’ civil rights as one of nation building in order to legitimate Asians’ claims to a place for themselves in Hawai’i” (Fujikane and Okamura, 2008: 2). While some have argued that settler colonialism works *through* immigrants (Saranillo, 2013), others have explored how narratives of Asian labor’s hyper-efficiency have become associated with a negative form of capital (Day, 2016). While this review is hardly comprehensive, it should be apparent that vibrant debates exist in which scholars are struggling to understand how white supremacy and colonization intersect.

In contrast, Chicana/o studies has been peripheral to such discussions. Certainly Chicana/o studies is no stranger to colonization, given U.S. conquest of Mexico (Acuña, 1972; Barrera, 1979; Almaguer, 1994; Rivera, 2006). Chicana studies scholars have challenged conventional historiography (Pérez, 1999), often including native women in their analyses (Castañeda, 1993; Chávez-García, 2004). Scholars have interrogated Chicana/o Indigeneity (Saldaña-Portillo, 2001, 2016; Contreras, 2008; Hartley, 2012), and more recently Indigenous Latina/o migration (Bianet Castellanos et al., 2012; Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004). Researchers have considered Chinese immigrants as settlers in the U.S. southwest (Luna-Peña, 2015). Some have compared Chicanas/os and Palestinians in terms of settler-colonialism (Lloyd and Pulido, 2010), while others have complicated such claims (Sánchez and Pita, 2014; Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo 2015). In short, the discipline is dancing around settler colonization and its implications, but has not taken the plunge. Instead, Chicanas/os are still largely scripted as the colonized. Literary scholar Nicole Guidotti-Hernández (2011) suggests that because Chicana/o studies is fixated on the U.S. conquest of Mexico, it has major blind spots. Consequently, the larger historiography of the U.S. West is replete with Mexican violence toward Indigenous peoples that is overlooked (Reséndez, 2016; Smith, 2013; González, 2005; Guidotti-Hernández, 2011).

Along with Guidotti-Hernández, historian Michael González is one of the few to document Mexican dispossession of native peoples. His analysis centers

on an 1846 letter written by Mexicans in Los Angeles to the Governor in which they complained about native people and requested that “the Indians be placed under strict police surveillance or the persons for whom the Indians work give [them] quarter at the employer’s rancho” (2005: 19). González argues that Mexican Angelenos embraced hegemonic Mexican culture, including eliminating *el indio barbaro* (the savage Indian) (see also Saldaña-Portillo, 2016).

There is also evidence of Mexican complicity in U.S. settler colonialism. Guidotti-Hernández’s (2011) study of Euro-American violence toward Mexicans and Mexico’s genocide toward *indios barbaros* includes the Camp Grant Indian massacre of 1871. Both Mexico and the United States fought the Apaches because they raided and refused a sedentary lifestyle. In 1871 the United States promised a group of Apaches safety at Camp Grant, Arizona, but locals, including Mexican leadership, massacred 144, mostly women and children. In short, we have clear evidence of Mexicans and Chicanas/os participating in settler colonialism, but we are unable to frankly discuss it and consider its meanings.

Chicana/o Studies’ Ambivalence toward Settler Colonialism

An inability to acknowledge such violence and its corresponding subjectivities suggests deep anxieties. Indeed, there are parallels between the United States’ refusal to acknowledge settler colonialism (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) and that of Chicana/o studies. Recognizing ethnic-Mexicans’ role in settler colonization is threatening because it would force Chicana/o studies to recognize multiple subjectivities, which in turn, would require rethinking the dominant narrative. This is similar to American Indian studies acknowledging, for example, that Cherokees owned slaves. But it’s not just a desire to avoid uncomfortable work. There is significant confusion regarding Chicana/o Indigeneity, which has been made almost illegible by colonization. Though both Indian and Indigenous are constructed categories. Native studies scholar Brian Klopotek (2016) has argued that Indian functions as a racial term, while Indigenous is a cultural and political one. While ethnic-Mexicans are overwhelmingly Indian, indigeneity is different. Exactly what are Chicanas/os indigenous to? When, if at all, does indigeneity cease? How does Indigeneity function within multiple national formations? Not only do Mexico and the United States have radically different conceptions of and approaches to Indigeneity (Contreras, 2008), but Chicanas/os, as transnational people, exist in the interstices of multiple national and regional racial formations (Saldaña-Portillo, 2016).

Chicanas/os: Indians or Indigenous?

Before examining Chicana/o Indigeneity more closely, I must distinguish between two distinct threads. One thread stems from the centuries-long history

of the peoples and lands of North America. A second strand has recently emerged through Indigenous immigration from Latin America to the United States (Bianet Castellanos, 2017; Bianet Castellanos et al., 2012; Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004). While Chicana/o studies includes both, they embody different temporalities. Specifically, the second is usually *recognized* as indigenous, while the first is more contentious. I focus on the first, which is foundational to Chicana/o studies.

Chicana/o studies exists as both a scholarly enterprise and a nation-building project. And like any nation, it had to forge a new identity. Previous to “Chicana/o,” which became widespread in the 1960s, ethnic-Mexicans living in the United States identified as Mexican American. “Chicana/o” is an explicitly oppositional term that drew upon counter-hegemonic histories, meanings, and experiences. Central to this was reclaiming an Indigenous heritage, which had been undermined by Mexico’s ideology of *mestizaje* as well as U.S. racism. *Mestizaje*, the idea of cultural and biological mixing, was a nation-building strategy that both assimilated and erased *lo indio* (Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, 2015). Within Chicana/o studies, the idea of decolonial *mestizaje* has emerged (Anzaldúa, 1987), as an attempt to overcome the racism of *mestizaje* (Hartley, 2012; Morgensen, 2011: 183–7; Saldaña-Portillo, 2001).

Debates around Chicana/o Indigeneity must be located in larger discussions of Indigeneity itself (Teves et al., 2015; Bianet Castellanos et al., 2012). According to one definition, the communities, clans, nations, and tribes we call “indigenous peoples” are just that:

Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with colonial societies that have spread out from Europe and other centers of empire. It is this oppositional and place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against . . . colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005: 597).

While seemingly straightforward, this definition hints at underlying complexities. For instance, locating Indigeneity in relation to a specific place overlooks Indigenous peoples’ contemporary and historic mobility (Díaz, 2015). When does tenure begin? Despite having lived in a place for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, we know that native peoples were on the move. Moreover, U.S. dispossession and the reservation system challenge any simple associations to land, boundary, or place.

An oppositional subjectivity is also central to this definition. While the Indigenous experience has been shaped by struggle, how salient and ubiquitous is it? Consider an urban apolitical Indian with no ties to a homeland—are they still indigenous? Not surprisingly, an oppositional stance conflicts with U.S. definitions, which mark indigeneity by blood (see Simpson, 2014). Still others

emphasize cultural practices and connections, including those who are part of native communities, but not blood members (Simpson, 2014). While American Indians have long debated these issues, they have been amplified by native studies, which has highlighted how Indigeneity is rooted in colonization and nation-state processes.

Chicana/o Indigeneity, like all other forms, must be grounded in the state (Hartley, 2012). As noted earlier, Chicana/o subjectivities and identities have been forged in and through overlapping Mexican and U.S. racial formations and nation-building projects (Saldaña-Portillo, 2016). These formations are both sequential and spatially and temporally overlapping. Here, we must draw on our most sophisticated understandings of place—how to understand a region as a palimpsest, a border zone, and a boundary simultaneously? While Mexico incorporated Indigeneity into its nation-building efforts, *mestizaje* has been highly contradictory. In contrast, the United States sought to obliterate native people physically and forged a white racial and national identity *exclusive* of them. Consequently, in the United States, native peoples are seen as distinct from the larger nation and insist they are sovereign. Though Indigenous Mexicans may oppose the state, like the Zapatistas, they do not necessarily see themselves as distinct nations (Saldaña-Portillo, 2001).

Chicana/o Indigeneity is based on several claims (see Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, 2015). First, it is based on Mexicans' long tenure in North America. This, however, raises the question of scale: Does North American Indigenous count as U.S. Indigenous? Some American Indians say “no.” In response, Chicanas/os charge that American Indians are reifying the colonizers' borders. A second pillar of Chicana/o Indigeneity is the belief that their ancestors originated in what is now the U.S. southwest and migrated south. This supposed homeland, *Aztlán*, actually appears on several maps.² As Chicana/o activists began reclaiming their Indigeneity, they drew heavily on an Aztec heritage: Nahuatl, Aztec art, dancing, and Day of the Dead celebrations. *Aztlán* is even the name of Chicana/o studies' foremost journal. Ironically, activists were actually celebrating an imperial power, since the Aztecs conquered many nations (Contreras, 2008; Urrieta, 2012).

A third claim to Chicana/o Indigeneity is colonization by Spain and U.S. colonization of Mexico. Mexicans lost land, power, status, and rights through the Mexican–American War. The parallels between Indian and Mexican dispossession have long been noted (Horsman, 1981). “That the Indian race of Mexico must recede before us, is quite as certain as . . . the destiny of our own Indians” (Thompson in Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014: 117). Mexico, as an indigenous and colonized country, continues to be subject to U.S. domination.

A fourth and final pillar of Chicana/o Indigeneity is mixing between American Indians and Mexicans, which has occurred for centuries under diverse circumstances, including pre-Columbian migrations, conquest, slavery, refuge, adoption,

and everything in-between. There are more than a few Chicanas/os who claim, for example, Pueblo heritage. And though many Southwest tribes, understandably, may not wish to claim Mexican ancestry, it is apparent in their names, language, religious practices, and such. Despite this reality, the United States insists on neat boundaries, however fictitious. Indeed, the Choctaw-Apache Tribe of Louisiana was initially denied federal recognition because they speak Spanish (Klopotek, 2016).

While Chicanas/os identify as Indigenous, they are not considered as such by the U.S. state and society, including many Americans Indians. This is because the United States emphasizes blood, a specific relationship to land (Contreras, 2008: 6), and continuous existence as a polity (Klopotek, 2016). Moreover, native studies scholar Deborah Miranda has noted that some American Indians refuse to recognize Chicana/o Indigeneity because legitimating “mestizos” could diminish their own status (in Hartley, 2012: 61). Others see Chicanas/os as simply another ethnic group desiring Indigeneity (Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, 2015). These denials of recognition make Chicana/o Indigeneity precarious.

Complicating claims of Indigeneity is the fact that Chicanas/os are categorized as white, although they have never been treated as such (Haney-López, 2003; Menchaca, 2001). White status is the result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Mexico insisted on classifying its people as white to shield them from U.S. racism. The United States conceded because of its unwillingness to tolerate racial ambiguity, which Mexicans epitomized, and because it sought to categorize all Indians in the newly acquired territory as “savage,” in order to justify continued dispossession and war, particularly against the Apache and Comanche (Saldaña-Portillo, 2016: 179).³ Chicanas/os’ legal whiteness and the various attempts to erase their Indigeneity illustrate the power of the state in shaping racial and political subjectivity (Haney-López 2003; Gómez 2007; Gross 2008).

It is because of such a tangled history that Chicanas/os desire to reclaim their past. Chicana/o Indigeneity is rooted in a “longing for a pre-colonial past that can never be known. The allure of Indigenous myth is strong as it may seem to provide a new grammar with which to challenge European and Euro-American domination of Native America” (Contreras, 2008: 165). But this reclaiming is not just about identity, it is also about grieving (Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, 2015; Saldaña-Portillo, 2016; Contreras, 2008). Much has been lost through colonizations and conquest, and Aztlán addresses that grief.

Aztlán: Colonization and Decolonization

Aztlán, as Chicanas/os’ mythical homeland, embodies a binational spatiality (Saldaña-Portillo, 2016). As a diasporic and transnational population, Chicanas/os must reconcile their relationship to two places. Their connection to Mexico (and Indigeneity) is apparent in the Aztecs, while the need to fit somehow in the United States is expressed through Aztlán.

As the ancient homeland of the Mexica, Aztlán is located in the U.S. southwest. Chicana/o activists reappropriated the territory Mexico lost to the United States and called it Aztlán. This was very strategic. First, activists were fashioning a homeland for themselves. For Chicanas/os the concept of Aztlán signaled a unifying point of cohesion through which they could define the foundations of an identity. Aztlán brought together a culture that had been somewhat disjointed and dispersed, allowing it, for the first time, a framework within which to understand itself (Anaya and Lomelí, 1989: ii). Aztlán not only performed internal work, but it also did important external work. Essentially, activists claimed land that had been “stolen” from Mexico through the war, as their ancient homeland. This not only foregrounded an imperialist war fueled by manifest destiny (Horsman, 1981), but challenged their perceived status as foreigners and “illegal immigrants.” Activists routinely reject imperialist boundaries with the refrain, “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.”

While Aztlán is clearly a decolonial act, it is also true that other peoples were living on the territory when Chicanas/os claimed it—including the Navajo, Apache, Comanche, Pueblo, Tohono O’odham, Mojave, Paiute, the many native peoples of California, and binational tribes, such as the Yaqui. While many American Indians have engaged in political alliances with Chicanas/os, I see Aztlán as problematic. For over 45 years Chicana/o activists have imagined their homeland on the territories of dispossessed people. Certainly it is understandable why Chicanas/os would want to claim these lands, but at the very least such a decision must be handled with respect, honesty, and in a spirit of solidarity. As far as I know, Chicanas/os never collaborated or consulted with American Indians on Aztlán. As such, Aztlán is simultaneously a decolonial and colonizing gesture.

American Indians are cognizant of this. While there have been moments of solidarity, and Chicanas/os have been granted membership in such organizations as the International Indian Treaty Council, some reject Chicanas/os as indigenous, as noted earlier (Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, 2015: 552). These tensions are readily apparent in New Mexico, which has the largest land-based Mexican population in the United States. The land grant struggles of the 1960s were one of the rallying points of the Chicana/o movement and were emblematic of a colonized status. Hispanos have historically celebrated their long history in the region, but American Indian activists have begun challenging dominant narratives of Spanish colonization. The Red Nation recently protested the re-enactment of La Entrada, which marks Spain’s reconquest of Santa Fe in 1692. It was not well received by Hispanos. One local responded, “This is our town. You had your chance and you lost” (Chacón, 2016). Such sentiments cannot be dismissed. While it is understandable why Chicana/o studies is reluctant to acknowledge settler colonialism, both intellectual integrity and political commitment require recognizing Chicanas/os’ multiple subjectivities.

Conclusion

By analyzing Chicana/o studies' muted response to settler colonialism I hope to encourage the discipline to acknowledge the multiple subjectivities of Chicanas/os and other Latinas/os, while also showing geographers the importance of relations between minoritized populations. Clearly, studying the political and racial subjectivity of any group is a deeply spatial exercise. Increasingly, scholars of Indigeneity are drawing on geography, both theoretically (Saldaña-Portillo, 2016; Goeman, 2013) and through popular education, such as Mapping Indigenous LA (<https://mila.ss.ucla.edu/>). The question of Indigeneity raises issues of land, place, borders, migrations, human-environment relations, and empire—questions that are central to geography. But it also raises questions that geography is less steeped in. I tread carefully here. I refuse to issue the typical call, “geographers should be studying this.” I do not think white geographers should rush to study the dynamics I have outlined. White people studying conflict between racially subordinated groups is ethically and politically fraught. This does not preclude them from doing so, but it requires a particular set of experiences and commitments to do so in a way that does not cause further harm. Rather, let us acknowledge how much geography is missing given its demographics and dominant approaches to studying race. Hopefully, one day when the discipline is more diverse, such a call could be made. Addressing settler colonialism is a long, painful, and difficult process, yet grasping its many manifestations is essential.

NOTES

- 1 This view is increasingly problematized by Latin Americanists, as seen in *American Quarterly's* special issue on settler colonialism in Latin America (Bianet Castellanos, 2017). For instance, Shannon Speed (2017) argues that native peoples were dispossessed of their land and then forced to work it. Elsewhere, geographer Sofía Zaragocin has highlighted the gendered nature of contemporary elimination (2019).
- 2 The Gemelli map of 1704 traces this migration, and Aztlán appears on the Disturnell Map of 1847.
- 3 The Pueblo were the exception because they were sedentary.

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