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INTRODUCTION

The Future of Chicana Studies: An Intergenerational Conversation with Historian Vicki L. Ruiz and Filmmaker Virginia Espino

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During the 1960s, many politically engaged Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants who were demanding racial, socioeconomic, and educational equality in the US were self-identifying as "Chicanas" and "Chicanos." In the words of feminist theorist Paula Moya, what distinguished a "Chicana" from a Mexican American or Mexican woman was "her political awareness; her recognition of her disadvantaged positions in a hierarchically organized society arranged according to categories of class, race, gender, and sexuality; and her propensity to engage in political struggle aimed at subverting and changing those structures" (Moya 2000, 85). Those structures included the patriarchy and sexism found within the Chicano civil rights movement itself, which often relegated women to administrative tasks while men occupied public positions of leadership within organizations. If Chicana members voiced concern for women's issues, they were accused of being divisive and subverting the movement's larger ethnic nationalist goals. Simultaneously, within the second-wave feminist movement, Chicanas—like other women of color—often felt alienated by white women who did not address issues of race or class in their critiques of sexism.

In response, Chicanas created their own movement that sought to illuminate and confront the intertwined oppressions of racism and sexism. From the late 1960s through the 1980s, they founded their own organizations, held conferences and workshops, published newspapers and magazines, and fought for the implementation of Chicana Studies courses. By 1968, a small number of universities in the Southwest offered these classes, taught by scholars like Anna NietoGomez in California and Martha Cotera in Texas. Cotera's book *Diosa y Hembra* (1976), an attempt to synthesize Mexican American women's "multitudinous histories" (4) and political activism from the pre-Columbian era to the contemporary period, was one of the first pieces of scholarship on ethnic Mexican women in the United States. Soon to follow was Magdalena Mora's and Adelaida del Castillo's volume of essays on Mexican women and unionization. Then, the landmark volume *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga and Anzaldúa's later work *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) made the nation and academy take particular notice of Chicana-produced literature.

The 1980s were also the decade in which Vicki L. Ruiz—a trailblazing Chicana historian featured in this issue—became the fourth Chicana history PhD in the country and published her first book *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives* (1987), a study of Mexican American women workers in Southern California's canning and packing industries during the 1930s and 1940s. The first historical monograph to focus on a community of Mexican women in the United States, it examined how Mexican and Euro-American women's social networks on the shop floor translated into labor activism and a brand of working-class feminism. That year, Ruiz's work was accompanied by other scholarship that focused on the late nineteenth and

twentieth centuries and sought to give Chicanas their rightful place in American labor history. Debunking the stereotype of the passive, homebound Mexican woman, anthropologists and historians documented Chicanas' longtime work outside of the home (including migratory labor) and the particular challenges they experienced while trying to preserve their cultures and communities in the face of an increasingly dominant white population settling in the US Southwest (Zavella 1987; Deutsch 1987).

Conversing about the topic of agency, most Chicana writers in the 1980s and 1990s decried any easy categorization of their subjects into a victim/resister binary. Chicanas' responses to multiple systems of dominance (along lines of gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, and citizenship) were varied, ranging from accommodation (intermarriage) to survival strategies (bringing divorce and land cases before courts) to other forms of rebellion (wearing a zoot suit or joining a political organization) (González 1999; Chavez-Garcia 2004; Oropeza 2005; Escobedo 2015).

As they chronicled these stories, Chicana scholars continued demanding that broader fields of study better incorporate women of color as historical subjects *and* as historiographical contributors. For example, in her 1992 essay, "Women of Color and the Rewriting of Western History: The Discourse, Politics, and Decolonization of History," Antonia I. Castañeda called for more histories of the US West to be produced by women of color, as most by that point had been written by white women. Offering an important reminder that hierarchies between women were not just part of the past but also the present, Castañeda asked historians to be conscious of the ways in which the academy itself could reproduce colonial structures.

Indeed, fields such as American labor, political, religious, and feminist history—just to name a few—become entirely new narratives when Chicanas are fully noticed and integrated. Whether it was in Cold War–era labor strikes, interracial civil rights coalitions, global gatherings of feminists, or the anti-pesticide and environmental movements, Chicanas were often at the forefront. Today's scholars continue to flesh out these moments, and exploration of the many strands of Chicana feminism is ongoing (Rose 1990; Ledesma 1995; Blea 1997; Chávez 2005; Pulido 2006; Esquibel 2006; Flores 2009; Perales 2010; Blackwell 2011).

With more existing syntheses and anthologies on Mexican American and Mexican immigrant women, the field of Chicana studies is much stronger but still hungry for new, bridge-building work (Schlissel, Monk and Ruiz 1988; Ruiz and DuBois 1994; Garcia 1997; Ruiz 1998; Arredondo and Hurtado 2003; Martinez 2008). The recent documentary film *No Más Bebés* (2015), created by Virginia Espino (a former student of Ruiz), is the other focus of this cluster, and rightly so. Based on her dissertation research on the forced sterilizations of ethnic Mexican women in 1970s Los Angeles, *No Más Bebés* is a powerful piece that addresses historically and presently important issues of feminism, racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, reproductive justice, and the pressing need to keep recovering and attending to Chicana lives and stories. As many victims of sterilization abuse in US history were women of color and undocumented women, Espino's film is a cinematic accompaniment to modern written work on the anxiety, isolation, and trauma suffered by marginalized and migrant populations (Rosas 2012).

Though Chicana studies emerged from a lack of felt coalition between men and women (and among women themselves), the field has matured and deepened its reach into other disciplines, including postcolonial, disability, sexuality, borderlands, and immigration studies. Yet the field must keep traveling in new directions. Temporally, we need to know more about predecessor and successor figures of the Chicana movement. Geographically, we need more work on Chicana activism in other regions of the US and on a transnational and international scale. Ideologically, engaging with the emerging scholarship on Latinos' relationships to conservatism might allow us to further tease out the diverse strains of Chicana religious and political thought.

Despite their generational divide, Ruiz and Espino hold the common mission of making Chicanas' stories visible and affirming their complexity and usefulness to other fields of study. Both are scholars who care deeply about testimony, intersectionality, social justice, and producing knowledge that is accessible to their students and the general public. Their respective work has made their audiences more curious, informed, and invested in Chicanas' and Latinas' continuing struggles for rights and inclusion.

The engagement with multiple publics that Ruiz and Espino exhibit and call for is so essential in our current moment. The virulent opposition to—or wholesale elimination of—Mexican American studies curriculum from US schools and textbooks today has required constant vigilance from the scholars who have developed this knowledge and the learners whose identities have been validated by being exposed to it. The field of Chicana/o studies needs more allies; it deserves protection and future development as more affronts to the rights of women, people of color, and migrants threaten, as Ruiz puts it in her interview, "basic human decency and dignity." The inclusivity and border-crossing modeled in the following conversations should spark new energy in those of us striving to become more dynamic intellectuals, storytellers, and builders of community.

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