

Centroamericanidades: Imaginative Reformulations and New Configurations of Central Americanness

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Basic Ideas, Problems, and Questions

The principal question posed in this special issue is: Where is Central America? At a primary level this would appear to be a simple geographical question, even if it were to offer a topology of a qualitatively distinct world. After all, as close as it is to the United States, Central American topologies written in the United States from hegemonic points of view have often crossed the threshold of the bizarre. Since the nineteenth century, US scientists, adventurers, and explorers lauded the fertility of the land while stereotyping the region's population with an intricate collection of abject terminology. It was still not too long ago either that Federal agencies in the US in charge of immigration and border control used to refer to Central Americans, and many others, as "OTMs": "Other than Mexicans." Bureaucratic as it may be, if to write is to invent a new language within language, and language is injurious, derogatory and demeaning, a name hurled at the insulted subject,¹ then the articulation of signifiers such as "OTMs" is telling. They hit their mark in addressing Central America's invisibility within the official, monoracial gaze of the US's governmental interpellative power that constructs vulnerable, objectionable brown bodies associated with that emblematic trope: the backyard. In Derridean terms it would be the presence of the absence of Central America within the US's social imaginary. Ileana Rodríguez's deprecation of nineteenth-century US geographers in *Transatlantic Topographies: Islands, Highlands, Jungles* (2004) must be remembered. Rodríguez notes how geographers such as E. G. Squier conceived of Central

America as an empty land, one where living subjects did not matter because, as racialized beings (Central Americans were brown; many were indigenous or of African descent) they were not recognized by the Eurocentric gaze evaluating the potential growth from the perspective of topography, the “criterion for a history that projects itself towards the future in the form of U.S. modernization” (138) of what would become the US’s *terra nostra* after 1898. From this date, Central America was marked as non-existent as a culture by US capitalism, as Squier’s tropicalist vision “of thematizing people within productive landscapes that have been targeted for progress” (144) won the day. Consequently, Central American subjects became part of an ethnic problem that has not gone away, morphing into the cartoon-image of banana republics, a geographical ethnospace still labeled as America’s backyard with not so subtle allusions to the back door through which slaves entered the servants’ quarters in ante-bellum Southern plantations (and to more abject forms of back door penetrations that defile the US body politic, from aliens to drugs). Their auratic melancholia found a new expression in the banana enclaves and coffee plantations that worked indigenous and African descendants in Central America in the twentieth century in much the same way as the slaves of the old, lost South, a trend continuing with mining into this century. As Claudia Milian argues, brownness has become the syntax with which to configure, disfigure, devalue or undervalue subjects of Central American origin.²

In those aspects regarding this special issue, it should be no surprise after reading the previous paragraph that Central America became a regime of coloniality for the US in the twentieth century and, consequently, despite the proven fact that the region not only produced a stylistically competitive literature in the second half of the same century, but also was the seat of Maya culture, one of the world’s most complex and sophisticated cultures the world has ever known, which latter defended a socio-natural world during half a millennium,³ these cultural achievements have been either ignored altogether, debased (Miguel Angel Asturias’s 1967 Nobel prize in literature labeled by US critics as a prize unjustly awarded to a second-rate writer), or questioned for their authenticity. Rigoberta Menchú’s interpellation by David Stoll’s radical illegibility on the basis that she could not have thought on her own the ideas that

appear in her book because, as suggested between the lines, she was an indigenous woman, two damning signs representing an absence of credibility from a heteronormative, racist perspective; it was left to the presumed white Anglo reader to conclude that neither indigenous subjects nor women were expected to think in the first place, thus exposing her as an usurper.

But, a subject is not a subject unless he/she is recognized dialogically as such. If this fact would be remembered not only in US public opinion but even in the study of the literatures of the metropolitan cultures of Latin America and Latinos in the US, all interested readers would then have access to an alternative narrative in the hemisphere's literary history, instead of the official canon that still skips the Central American region when conveying a hodgepodge labeled Latin American Literature, or the one that limits Latino literature to those texts produced by Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican-Americans and Cuban Americans. Central American and Central American-American cultures may represent a history of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination, ending up as excluded, racialized Others. Nevertheless, despite the scatological violence, their writers' will to speech, a Mayan inheritance, reclaimed language, knowledge and sovereignty, articulating a structure of belonging by virtue of the word, giving a social existence to those victims of injurious speech that were denied their very subjectivity in the first place. The imperialist gaze and its assault on the region also produced an enabling response, one that inaugurated discursivities that structured language to oppose the offensive reduction to banana republics and other epithets justifying political and military occupation for economic purposes. The words that tried to justify those acts in the name of the US's "manifest destiny" became the discursive conditions that enabled a Central American literature to emerge as an imaginary contestation to the regulation of their people and their economies by the US for the control of their territories and resources. The result has been a rich literary heritage waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in US universities. The denial of literary representation to Central American subjects has historically formed a corollary to the literal denial of economic, legal, and political representation, as shown in the public media during the region's civil wars of the 1980s. These concerns foster the

emergence of this special issue, together with the conviction that literary studies offer an innovative and alternative way of dealing with ethical and political responsibilities in our time. We mean to expand the definition of both Latin American and Latino literature here, not to remain locked within the narrow confines of literature understood in its nineteenth-century configuration, but within a more inclusive notion that articulates Central Americans and Central American-Americans' social inscription within the purview of contemporary knowledges impacting the cultural landscape and racial configuration of the US in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

This special issue wants to suggest that Central America must be understood as geographically displaced through complex connections of commodities, people and cultural production. Central America is not contained in a small collection of nation-states over there but is, increasingly, also over here, within the US Latino population, and in various other multidirectional processes affecting and infecting the entire population of this problematically divided country.⁴ Central America is both a real site and a sight, an imaginary representation of a place that is displaced beyond physical space though discourses, images and other cultural productions, yet a presence to readers formed by power that internalized the exclusion or displacement of any real thing labeled as Central America/n.⁵ This issue becomes thus a site, a spatial arrangement, from which Central American/American literary production may begin its presencing, in Heideggerian terms, one emblematic of how the colonized other continues to be construed.

Within the US mainstream, Central American-Americans have gained prominence as Central Americans only in the aftermath of infamous operations targeting undocumented migrants like the so-called Postville Raid in Iowa, a raid at the Agriprocessors Inc. kosher slaughterhouse and meat packing plant in Postville, Iowa, on May 12, 2008. This heavily militarized roundup by the US Customs and Immigration Enforcement agency (ICE) became the largest immigration raid in the history of the US. Hundreds of ICE agents stepped into the kosher meat processing plant and detained 389 undocumented workers. Most of them were of Guatemalan Maya origin. A classical documentary film, *abUSed*:

The Postville Raid (2010), was subsequently directed and produced by Guatemalan film maker Luis Argueta. It remains as one of the salient events showing that, despite the slippery decenteredness of US governmental power, this nation remains yoked to the racialized wheel of political and cultural normativity that may be less visible to the white citizenry. However it is no less tyrannical to subjects of color living in conditions of oppression generated by the deployment of biopower against those who are legally the most vulnerable, and the most exploited, in an attempt to produce within them a self-loathing that can be assuaged only through mastering the moral techniques of either ethnic pride or disciplined political action. Still, undocumented workers remain located by many US citizens in an exteriority to their own understanding of nation, a site of incomprehensibility to their own ethos, despite this nation's trajectory of constantly producing new subjectivities and, as the cliché goes, reinventing itself.

Central American migration has also had an impact on Central American countries themselves and regions of origin since the original mass departure to the US during the civil wars of the 1980s. As has already been documented by innumerable books and articles, the massive flow of Central American immigrants to the US was a direct result of the brutality of these wars and their toll on peasant communities.⁶ As armies financed by the Reagan administration advanced, destroying village after village and massacring its occupants, thousands of refugees, primarily from El Salvador and Guatemala, seeking safety for themselves and their children, fled to Mexico. Some remained there in UN-sponsored refugee camps, but many more continued on to the US and Canada. Anti-Sandinista Nicaraguans also fled their country, primarily to Miami and other areas of Florida.⁷

Ostensibly, peace was signed in El Salvador in 1992, the same year that the Los Angeles riots took place (the first social event that brought to the forefront the presence of Central American residents in Southeast Los Angeles, raising howls of fear and fury as the sight of their tattooed bodies burning Korean markets monopolized the evening news). Peace was also signed in Guatemala in 1996. This implied, in principle, a process of social reconciliation, reconstruction, and development. Nevertheless, the peace dividend

never happened. The arrival of peace did end military combat, as guerrillas turned in their weapons and formed legal political parties. But the much-promised international aid never arrived in sufficient quantity. What was expected to be a massive Marshall-like plan to fully modernize these nations to uproot a model of underdevelopment became only a trickle that dwindled to almost nothing after 2000. The most delinquent country in terms of economic aid was the United States. Despite President Clinton's apologies to the population of Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua in 1997, the US Congress only approved negligible aid to them in the post-war period. Peace is meaningless without development. There can be no development without a massive influx of capital. As a result, the actual effect of the post-war was one of little economic growth, massive unemployment (officially recorded at 50% in Guatemala and El Salvador, but most likely higher in both countries), and the gradual emergence of a non-regulated parallel power to the state produced by criminal gangs. These gangs, especially the now infamous Mara Salvatrucha and Mara-18, bearers of tattooed bodies running wild in the streets of Los Angeles, gained muscle, wealth, and prestige as unemployed youngsters and immigrants deported from the US joined their ranks not only in the US itself, but also in Central America, where gangs became retailers, if not partners, of those products transported through the isthmus by Colombian and Mexican drug cartels. The growth of a transnational gang network and the turn of many peasants in the region to the drug business were direct consequences of the US reneging on most promises made prior to the signing of the peace treaties after the election of George W. Bush in 2000, and most markedly after 9/11, when Central America became thoroughly invisible once again in US foreign policy. Meanwhile the immigration escape valve began to close.

The lack of economic opportunity, combined with the massive amount of unemployed ex-soldiers, including known torturers and other criminals who were a big part of the implementation of counter-insurgency policies in both countries, as post-war armies were reduced in size and military budgets much reduced, led to a rapid rise in banditry and street crime and quickly transformed Guatemala City, San Salvador, and Tegucigalpa into hubs of brutal

violence and femicide. This unexpected factor meant that instead of enjoying greater safety as a blissful consequence of the end of decades of civil war, most Central American citizens were now exposed to the greatest crime wave in their history, with the added caveat that neither individual citizens nor governmental institutions had any control over these mobile, translocal, transnational groups, better armed and financed than the governments of the territories in which they operated. There is a major problem when the average middle-class citizen waxes nostalgically for the safety conditions that existed during the civil war years. Within a short period of time most social sectors lost faith in the state's capacity to control these criminal elements and began to arm themselves, to pay for private security, or to endorse draconian measures to eliminate them, even when they trampled hard-won civil liberties. That the region did not plunge into a new spiral of civil war is both a miracle, and a tribute to their war-scarred citizens who worked against all odds to enforce the rule of law.

Central American-Americans

Particularly in the current political context in the US, and more specifically for Latino/as in this country, the focus on Central American populations merits a special concern. It should be imperative for both US scholars and the public at large to learn to better locate the Central American population's experience at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century. It is also by understanding the invisibilization lived by Central American populations that Americans will better understand the nature of contemporary racialization going on inside their own borders and fanned, in many cases, by white supremacists ensconced within Tea Party membership. In *Latining America*, Milian complicates simplistic multi-culturalism as lived by the US in the last forty years by exploring identities-in-the-making that challenge what a Latino or Latina may be. She argues on behalf of new subjectivities previously uncharted in any form of identity politics, those Latinities identifying elements that may belong to blackness, brownness, or dark brownness. In this way, she articulates a revolutionary transformation of what have been up to now recognizable, even stereotypical, US notions of Latinos and

Latinas, moving categorically away from ideological notions linked to nationalism. Milian manifests copious knowledge about elements that define parenthetical bodies.

Milian's analysis is significant today given the growth and consequent visibility and significance of Central Americans in both the US as a whole and among Latino/as; but, even more relevant than this, it demonstrates how the influx of Central Americans into the US has changed the way we understood *Latinidad*. The experiences of indigenous Guatemalan Mayas in new destination areas and regions such as Iowa (cf. Camayd Freixas, 2008), and their expulsion and subsequent Guantanamo-type imprisonment, marks unequivocally the colonial legacy of racism as one determining the biopolitics associated with the surgical removal of Central American-Americans from the body politic of Anglo-centered mainstream US when convenient (though it should be stated that most Anglo residents of Postville were extremely supportive of the immigrants, as *abUSed* makes clear). For the last twenty or so years, some theorists have been working on the concept of "coloniality of power" deployed to move thinking beyond Western and Eurocentric conceptualizations, a term coined by sociologist Aníbal Quijano in 1991. As Quijano has pointed out, Latin American-ness cannot be conceived without the definitional framework of this concept that informs the positionality of non-European migrants in the US, while simultaneously problematizing ethno-racial subjective formations grounded on the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race and/or caste and the memories of violence that these invoke when articulated in discursive productions. Coloniality of power basically means the production of identities based on race, conjoined with a hierarchy between European and non-European identities in which the first have oppressed all others, together with the construction of mechanisms of social domination designed to preserve this historical foundation and social classification. Coloniality began with the Spanish conquest of indigenous peoples in the Americas by articulating a colonial matrix of power that configured an epistemological perspective through which racialization was channeled. Even if colonialism no longer exists, coloniality continues to operate as an epistemological framework in contemporary intercultural relations. The novelty

of the argument is, therefore, both in regard to the explication of the world-historical nature of coloniality, as well as its systemically constitutive role in the making of the modern world. The Postville raid, while comprehensive from within this perspective, also points in the direction of a coloniality of diaspora, one where ethno-racial and historical traits bind people to a colonizing past. It is also one where discontinuities continue to mark the way subjects are identified and labeled, and explains how they are left grappling with variable structures of power, many exercised by other minorities themselves, in function of them.

Milian delves into these issues to enrich the analysis of the Central American-American scheme, one with no previous antecedent. As she states, “there have been no other U.S. ethnoracial models ... that accentuate reiterative modes of American-American excess to underscore a triumvirate U.S. (American), regional (Central and Latin American), and panethnic (U.S. Latino and Latina) disenfranchisement” (28). Her thinking then moves in the direction of racialization, an indelible marker within our understanding of globalized coloniality:

Other Latinos, like current U.S. Latinos and Latinas, are imagined as Central and South American aggregates to “brown.” It is a brownness that is not revamped and that does not cross any ethno-racial borders that attend to divergent forms of the national. How is an Other (U.S.) Latino, in the context of Central Americanness, produced? An undisputable “browned” indigeneity could very well be its definitive Central American marker. But more than another form of Latinoness, another type of Central Americanness is emphasized, another neglected Latino and Latina simultaneity whose “presencing” has yet to be localized in the U.S. Latino and Latina landscape. And, to be sure, that have yet to be fully mobilized in our critical practices and their political implications. (145-46)

Milian also states that Garifunas in the US are Central American-Americans, and asks: “Will the presumed African Americanness of these Central American groups be localized within the theoretical directions and dimensions that mark Central American-Americanness: unnameability, invisibility, awkwardness, and off the

hyphen status?" (149)

Milian's quotes implicitly invoke Foucault's notion of biopolitics as a regime of discipline, one concerned with the surveillance, manipulation, and management of human life. Biopolitics explains the State's attempt to regiment people, from prohibiting certain actions to actively shaping and manipulating peoples' actions overall, and drawing lines of exclusion, lines that are forbidden to transgress. The various institutions that normalize behavior find ways to include everybody and everything within a grid of carefully managed alternatives and possibilities. This logic is seen in ICE's raid on Postville, the overall US policy of looking the other way while illegals enter the country's geographical habitus while it is convenient, yet repressing them when it is not convenient, and when it is no longer enough to deport immigrants without stripping them of their dignity and humiliating them publically. Biopolitics evidences how the US's colonializing perspective articulates the particular way it conceives the multiplicity of lives, living beings, and life processes that surround its Anglo-centric imperial perspective.

Original Contributions of this Special Issue

Traditional academic divisions among departments, fields, and disciplines have prevented an integral study of Centroamericanidades that include both what is happening in the Isthmus, and what is happening among Central American-Americans in the US. As a result, the doings of Central Americans in the Isthmus are studied by Latin Americanists, whereas the doings of Central Americans in the US are studied by Latina/o scholars. This division is artificial. Migrating Central Americans do not become Latina/os the minute they succeed in crossing the border. This traditional division obscures the extent to which Central Americanness remains fluid geographically. From economic remittances to deported immigrants to expelled gang members to Maya ritual practices to Garifuna cultural festivities, there is a cultural and economic corridor continually flowing between the Isthmus and Canada, crossing through Mexico and settling the US. This special issue will be the first time that Central Americanness is studied in an interdisciplinary, holistic approach.

This special issue shares a restless interdisciplinary desire to

carefully weigh and understand the many ways in which Central America, in all its expressions (i.e. indigenous, African descendant, etc.), figures in its original site, in the US, and elsewhere, exploring its unfolding identities, practices, and representations. Ultimately, it should be a contribution to re-conceptualizing Latin American Studies no longer as a somewhat outdated fragment of Area Studies, but also as a surreptitious infiltration by a Central American unconscious (in this particular case) that marks new configurations of Latin American Studies along the lines developed jointly at the University of Texas at Austin's Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies and the Center for Mexican American Studies, among other places. It should also be a reconceptualization of Latina/o Studies as it moves away from a conglomerate of nation-based hyphenated identities to a discursive construction, a narrative device pointing in the direction of a colonality of diaspora, one where ethno-racial and historical traits bind people to a colonizing past. It is also one in which discontinuities continue to mark the way subjects identify themselves, place themselves within a diasporic environment, and are left grappling with variable structures of power, many exercised by other minorities themselves, with them, within them, or in function of them. In this light, this special issue is comprised of eight articles spanning these broad topics and deploying issues both down there in the isthmus, and up here within the colonality of diaspora in the US.

Ana Patricia Rodríguez begins in "Diasporic Reparations: Repairing the Social Imaginaries of Central America in the Twenty-First Century" by arguing that contemporary Central American diasporic writers write in response to multiform articulations of violence. Thus, in their works, they grapple with the image of Central America as a site of unsustainable violence, inhospitable material conditions, and unresolved historical issues that extend as a metaphorical umbilical cord into the lives of Central Americans in the US. The region's past lies at the core of transnational Central American subject formation. Her essay therefore examines how violence, impunity, and immigration are closely tied in Central American diasporic texts and hold cognitive relevancy for Central Americans inside and outside of the isthmus. Rodríguez claims that, while Central Americans in the US seek to understand the origins and

conditions of their diaspora, US Central American writers contribute to critical debates on Central American historiography, diaspora, and the construction of transnational Centroamericanidades in the twenty-first century.

Turning to the isthmus itself, Regan Boxwell's "The Disembodied Subject: Resistance to Norms of Hegemonic Identity Construction in Carmen Naranjo's *Diario de una multitud*" states that Naranjo avoids constructing individual subjectivities in favor of collective representation of the urban citizenry. She then argues that the constant blurring that resets specific identities, and the disappearance of the private realm, become a way out of inscribing lesbian desire, disassociating subjectivity from the social. This novel presents a disregarded lesbian. The urban multitudes are a spectacle of diversion implying a *mise en abyme* of sexual desire, a specular exploration on the impossibility of liberating lesbian sexual desire. The blemished melancholy of the multitude stands in place of the erased lesbian haunting the pages but never actually appearing in them. Consequently, the splintered subjectivities, the absence of sexual markers, and the secretiveness of private lives imply the violence with which sexuality has been repressed in the Costa Rica of the 1970s.

Likewise, Junyoung Verónica Kim covers a much-forgotten area of displaced Central Americanness in "Centering Panama in Global Modernity: The Search for National Identity and the Imagining of the Orient in Rogelio Sinán's 'Sin novedad en Shanghai.'" Kim examines Sinán's short story to reconfigure what she claims is a national ethos that interrogates official inter/national imaginaries of Panama while supporting an alternative vision of the Central American nation. By exploring a story that takes place in East and Southeast Asia during World War II, her contention is that the deployment of "the Orient" as a geopolitical, cultural, symbolic and imaginary space allows Sinán to reposition Panama in a symbolic relation to this geospace. This seeming interrogation of Panama's dominant discourse situating this country as a peripheral actor in global modernity thereby questions the center/periphery binary (which can also be read as North/South). Kim thus claims that Sinán re-oriens Panama, dismantling East/West divisions and their deployment in fashioning Panama's and Latin America's position in

the world.

Karina Oliva Alvarado's "The Boo of Viramontes's Cafe: Retelling Ghost Stories, Central American Representations of Social Death," returns to a re-problematization of *Latinidad*. Oliva Alvarado explores a three-fold negation through the representational experiences of undocumented immigration, gender, and Central American nonentity in Viramontes's short story, to address Central American differences erased by the utopian desire for reconciliation in Chicana/Latina authored texts. She claims that while social death is originally conceived and applied through "a mode of oppression through which slaves, and by extension those who grew up under the control of Jim Crow society" were coerced through hegemony, Oliva Alvarado understands its current relevance as allegorical to the conditions that de-socialized and depersonalized literary representations of Central Americans in the US. Ultimately, she asks what those contemporary hegemonies are that socially kill the articulation of Central American subjectivities in a Latina/o U.S. imaginary.

Oriel María Siu explores in "Central American Enunciations from US Zones of Indifference, or the Sentences of Coloniality," how Central American diasporic experiences in the US continue to be sites for the exertion and reproduction of coloniality. The author analyzes *Odyssey to the North* (1998) by Mario Bencastro, *Big Banana* (1998) by Roberto Quesada, *The Tattooed Soldier* (1998) by Héctor Tobar, and *Inmortales* (1983) by Oscar René Benítez, in the framework of both Giorgio Agamben's discussion of Modernity's sustained state of exception, and in that of Peruvian thinker Aníbal Quijano's coloniality of power. Siu concludes that the novels studied evidence that Central American subjects are not only removable and exploitable, but have no political consequences for the overall functioning or well-being of their new polis. In those novels, the coloniality of being corrodes the ways in which the Central American diasporic subjects act, look, and think while struggling to survive as such. The representations in question make evident how coloniality has permeated post-national endeavors among Central Americans in the US, while also manifesting these individuals' will to permanence.

In "From Epicentro To Fault Lines: Rewriting Central

America from the Diaspora,” Maritza Cárdenas examines the way representations from the Central American diaspora re-write the Central American imaginary: specifically, how the interrelationships between geographic spaces and identity converge in the works of Central American-American writers. Cárdenas performs an in-depth analysis of Marlon Morales’s poem “Centroamérica is” to argue that, despite the poem’s scathing critique of Central America calling it a “national pretense” of “consumer propaganda,” there is still an affinity or desire to be a part of this imaginary space and to be Central American. In her understanding, this tension enables the creation of this translocal identity of “epicentros” ‘epicenters.’ It is an identity that aims to find new linkages and connections that forge the histories of the isthmus with the new translocal space of Los Angeles.

A new angle of problematization, that of the Maya presence among Central American immigrants to the US, is taken in Alicia Ivonne Estrada’s “Cultural Transgressions in Omar S. Castañeda’s *Remembering to Say ‘Mouth’ or ‘Face.’*” Estrada contests assimilation projects in the US and deconstructs national and hyphenated identities to search for alternative narratives of belonging that are attuned to the characters’ multiple embodied subjectivities and positionalities. She argues that rooting these short stories within the narrative structure of the *Popol Wuj* (Mayas’ sacred book depicting their origins and beliefs) allows for the construction of different historical references and cultural genealogies, which are not solely based on national identities or histories. These stories, rather, construct a communal self that contests the varied forms of social and political oppressions experienced by indigenous peoples, migrants as well as racialized subjects in the US and Guatemala. In this way, the stories do not assert a unitary national, or bi-national, identity, but rather emphasize the characters’ multiple embodied subjectivities and positionalities.

Finally, Yajaira Padilla argues in “Maurice Echeverría’s *Labios: A Disenchanted Story about Lesbians in Guatemala’s Postwar Reality*,” that this work of fiction is implicated in a broader process of sexual minority visibility that extends beyond what is shown on the page. The ways in which the narrator depicts and contemplates the lesbianism and livelihoods of the characters do not affirm his

own queer positioning. Instead, it seems to uphold the visibility narratives of dominant discourses and consumer-oriented portrayals of gay and lesbian urban lifestyles. However, Padilla claims that this very gesture reveals an alternate and composite form of visibility, which can be understood as a *visibilidad cosmo-queer*. This visibility is an expression of the complex social reality of sexual minorities in postwar Guatemala, one marked by global or cosmopolitan discourses of gay and lesbian identity politics as well as queer modes of self-definition that challenge those same dominant discourses. Padilla suggests the need for a more complex understanding of this reality, including the bearing that global and local factors have on how local subjects see and experience their sexuality, and also the need to recognize the fact that Central America also has a claim to gay and lesbian studies.

This special issue aims to emphasize and detail the ways that Central Americans are *marcando presencia* 'making a mark' within the US and Latino/a landscape at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, complicating the concept of *Latinidad*. Far from presenting Central American-American as a complete and coherent terrain, the writers aim to provide a blueprint for investigating and incorporating another integral component of Latinoness. Ultimately, this special issue is a small contribution to addressing omissions, absences or injustices, primarily through the imaginary realm.

Notes

1 See Butler's discussion in the introduction to *Excitable Speech* (1997), especially in that which invokes the conventions of the utterance that constitutes the injurious speech act.

2 See Milian *Latining America: Black-Brown Passages and the Coloring of Latino/a Studies*.

3 The category of "socionatural world" is taken from Arturo Escobar's definition as one bringing together the complexity of relations between the biophysical and human domains that account for particular configurations of nature and culture, society and nature, landscape and place, as lived-in and deeply historical entities. See *Territories of Difference* (29).

4 According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 53 million Latinos in the US as of July 1, 2012, making people of Latino origin the nation's largest ethnic or racial minority. Latinos constituted 17 percent of the nation's total population. "Hispanic Americans: Census Facts." <<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/hhmcensus1.html>>.

5 Here I am echoing Said's definition of representation. See *Orientalism* (21).

6 The list of books arguing this point is long. Suffice it to mention here my own *Taking Their Word: Literature and the Signs of Central America* (2007), as well as Ana Patricia Rodríguez's *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures, and Cultures* (2009), and, especially, Norma Chinchilla and Nora Hamilton's *Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Los Angeles* (2001).

7 This introduction was written on the day when Guatemalan dictator Efraín Ríos Montt was ordered to stand trial for genocide and crimes against humanity, for those crimes committed by his regime in the 1980s.

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