

## CULTURAL IDENTITY IN LATIN AMERICA

### Toward a Cooperative Understanding of Our Past

*Carlos Manuel Salomon, with Laura Inés Catelli, Jorge Majfud,  
Paloma Martínez-Cruz, Magalí Rabasa, Enrique Salmón,  
Umi Vaughan, and Gloria E. Chacón*

This essay reflects the intermingling of concepts concerning the idea of culture in the geographic region known as Latin America. Locating a universal meaning of cultural identity, of course, is impossible. Latin Americans and the emerging Latinx population in the United States are so distinct from one another that the goal of finding any such meaning seems strange. Yet the people of Latin American origin have one thing in common that goes beyond the simple markers of religion and language: they traverse borders at an almost unprecedented rate, borrowing new identities, languages, and political concepts along the way, breaking from the confinement of their local worlds and, in the process, becoming transnational actors. We have all heard the anecdote of the migrant who only becomes politicized once he has left the confines of his small town; mingling with other migrants in a foreign land he is able to better understand the globalized forces that caused him to leave in the first place. It is no coincident that migration is a force that unifies the consciousness of distinct people. Latin American migration is rooted in struggle and coercion. The very people who are leaving have ancestors who crossed oceans, were brought over in chains, were stripped of their culture and lands, and forced to relocate. Migration is a continuation of that process and it is in this reality that a new identity emerges.

#### **Jorge Majfud**

Many of the authors in this volume have had similar experiences. For example, the Uruguayan scholar Jorge Majfud, who now lives and teaches in Florida at Jacksonville University, explains how he has changed since he left his homeland.

*First, we should consider an existential detail that we normally omit when answering this type of question: I am no longer exactly the same. I am twelve years older and almost everything looks different from the vantage of forty-seven. Also, what we imprecisely call Latin America has changed, almost as much as the rest of the world. After this we can reflect on cultural dynamics. To see one's culture from within the immersion of another is always revealing. One has to compare and contrast the inner and outer view. The same is true of language: as we learn a second language we become more aware of the nature of the first language.*

*Latin America is a vast and extremely diverse region, so talking about “our culture” is the product of another linguistic trap: a Mexican from Chihuahua and another from Arizona or California have more in common with each other than with an Argentine, for example. But Latin American cultures unite us with the language, the awareness of the existence of the other and the way the Great Brother of the North has treated us in the past. It is the gaze and sometimes the intimidation of the US that has been part of our common identity. For example, there is the idea of the other and the denial of Latinidad within the borders of the United States. Ethnic classification, typical of this country, defines hatred and elections even today, like nowhere else in the world.*

*When I first came to the United States by airplane in 2003 I was given a form where, among other things, I had to mark “race.” It seemed very exotic to me and I wrote above: “no race.” I never felt Latino or Hispanic until after I lived here for a few years. That classification, in fact, is an American invention, which has now been transformed into a banner of vindication, because we (the others) have entered a game that we did not invent and have learned to play in order not to suffer the consequences of total defeat.*

*From an academic point of view, it is impossible to delve into the history of U.S.–Latin American relations and not find a long list of crimes presented as salvations, and of dictatorships who served in the name of freedom and democracy. Fortunately, the arrogance and disdain with which Latin America has been viewed from the North (based on ignorance of its own crimes of interventions, plots, imposition of bloody dictatorships throughout the subcontinent) has been limited and mitigated by some of the best Americans. They are people with great intellectual courage who have not allowed themselves to be intimidated by the propaganda or the tribal reactions of their own people.*

*Today Latin America is not the same region of magical realism populated by guardian dictators of a monoculture system. But its conflict still lives, as does the old tendency of its rulers to perpetuate their power. Latin American corruption served many, although in different ways: it served the world powers to exploit its resources with cheap labor; it served the local oligarchies to enrich themselves with the blood of the rabble and the indigenous; and it served the poorest by allowing them to survive. This continues, especially in large countries like Mexico and Brazil and a few small ones like those in Central America.*

*Corruption in the United States is different. It is usually legal, like when powerful lobbies pressure their representatives in Congress (more than half are millionaires and come from the wealthiest 1% of the population) to pass laws that benefit them. After this process they are the least interested in violating their own laws, obviously.*

CS: It’s funny how you began to feel Latin American when you first arrived in the United States. For me, it was the opposite. It was when I traveled and studied in Mexico, and, ironically, when I read the work of your late friend and compatriot Eduardo Galeano. This may have something to do with how Latinos are assimilated into public schools. Studying, living, and learning in Latin America was a revelation. Galeano’s work really gave me a sense of the struggle against colonialism that was occurring in Latin America.

*In this instance, it is necessary to differentiate the Latin American identity from the Hispanic one. The first was an invention of the French in the nineteenth century that came about during the birth of the new republics; the second is a result of the U.S. government more recently, which ended up classifying “Hispanics” as “the other.” This surfaced from an Anglo-American culture that is proud of its “melting pot” (which never melts). The first identity, the Latin American one, was and still is basically regional and cultural, if not*

*regional and political; The second, the idea, the perception and the identity of being “Hispanic” is, as is typical of American history and culture, an ethnic phenomenon, despite the enormous ethnic diversity of what is technically Hispanic or Latino.*

*Historically the Southern Cone, especially in Argentina and Uruguay, were considered the “southern Europeans” who did not descend from any tribe or pre-Hispanic civilization but from the ships. It was in the middle of the twentieth century that we stopped looking so much at France and began to look at our brothers and sister from the continent. This is exactly what happened to the young Argentine Ernesto Guevara as he travelled across the continent: He discovered Latin America and discovered his Latin American self. The intellectuals had already tried it before, in a somewhat forced way (José Martí, José Rodó, Ruben Darío, José Vasconcelos, etc.). But it was the political consciousness of the twentieth century that made this a reality—in awareness rather than ideas. The Cuban Revolution was a turning point in that direction. The people of the Rio de la Plata region felt they were civilized because we had killed all of the Indians; because we had the best education systems, the best economies; we were the most developed in the continent with a high per capita income and advanced social programs that had balanced the social classes. Suddenly, we experienced our own decline and soon developed a sense of guilt for not having totally belonged to Latin America. It was writers like Neruda, Benedetti, and Galeano who created or consolidated that continental consciousness by which we began to feel Latin American.*

*However, feeling “Hispanic” or “Latino” is not exactly the same and you have to live in the United States to appreciate the difference, because it is basically a North American identity.*

CS: Your experience brings a question to mind: Referring back to your essay, how do you feel connected with the stories of the Aztecs and Incas and to spiritual *mestizaje*? Is there something in them that defines the spirit of Latin America?

*I tried to answer that question in my book *El eterno retorno de Quetzalcoatl*. For example: the same idea of the Southern Cone as a cultural region built by Europeans and white creoles in the near absence of the indigenous heritage survives today. An extreme example came from the former president of Uruguay, Julio Maria Sanguinetti, who wrote that we did not receive anything from the indigenous Charrúa people, not even a word. Of course, we robbed them and killed them because we thought them to be so savage and because they did not accept our culture in return for their lands and their freedom. But I was always surprised to discover, among thousands of secret clues, that in the Castilian language survived expressions, indigenous ideas, from as far away as the Guarani, the Incas, and even the Maya. The street language of my early teenage friends was full of indigenous expressions that nobody noticed as such. What could you expect from countries with a strong indigenous tradition like Bolivia, Peru, Guatemala, or Mexico? This raises the question of whether it is possible to completely erase a culture in the process of violent colonization. My initial hypothesis is simply no: The repression of a memory does not mean elimination. The repressed element is transmuted, transposed to survive in the shadows, as in one’s personal psychology, and is found in an alien format such as writing, documents of the colonizer, the oral tradition collected and expressed in art and literature. The same historical and mythological evolution of an Argentine like Ernesto Che Guevara has much in common with a Mexican god like Quetzalcoatl and retains much of the indigenous, pre-Hispanic and contemporary, way of seeing the world. The Utopias of left-wing intellectuals, like that of Eduardo Galeano, a Uruguayan marked by the indigenous sensibility or, at least, anti-materialist: they were not Marxist at all, nor materialistic, but were*

*influenced by the cosmic/naturalist paradigm of indigenous mentality, of a return to our origins, to a past that was lost, like all that is ahead of us, beyond the future.*

Like Majfud, Laura Ines Catelli studied and lived in the United States for many years. She is now back living and teaching in her native Argentina. Her perspective on the way Latin American culture is written in the English language engages new forms of colonialism, which may or may not be intentionally motivated. This analysis dovetails with the idea that among Latin Americans who have lived in the United States, as Majfud noted, a new analysis has emerged. I asked Catelli about how this exchange has affected her perception of Latin American culture and identity.

### Laura Inés Catelli

*Your observations pose a truly complex question regarding how Latin America has been imagined and constructed from different loci of enunciation. I personally would not attempt a generalization of how scholars from different countries or regions think of Latin America. One could assert nonetheless that there is often a tension between ideas of nation (national traditions, the nation-state as a problem), and ideas of continental unity that can be traced back to José de San Martín and Simón Bolívar in our region (for former Hispanic colonies), and to twentieth-century dependence theories and the center-periphery model (based on the economist Raúl Prebisch's work). It is almost as if the idea of Latin America coagulates in economic and political terms as a unifying concept that is anticolonial and anti-imperialistic. The underside here is the impossibility of thinking comparatively and to be able to account for the diversity of national projects and internal colonialism (I'm using Pablo González Casanova's and Rodolfo Stavenhagen's term here, more recently theorized by Bolivian Aymara sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui). This tension is present today in works that are representative of the decolonial turn (Quijano, Mignolo, etc.). At the same time, the decolonial turn has inscribed the problem of race along with that of gender and class into what was understood mostly as a class problem (in Marxist terms). In sum, the idea of Latin America from the Southern Cone seems to be an anticolonial and anti-imperial expression, but only recently and very slowly has race begun to be understood as part of the problem. This is, in part, thanks to Quijano's concept of coloniality of power and Mignolo's insistence on decolonial genealogies, which include Black and indigenous voices that share what Anzaldúa called "una herida abierta," la herida colonial.*

*From the U.S., I think the idea of Latin America among Latin Americanists is very closely tied up with Area Studies and the resulting Latin American Studies programs, that tend to see the region as a relatively stable object of study. There is a distance in this sense that I find ideologically problematic, insofar as Latin Americanist scholars in the U.S. don't examine their own locus of enunciation (the U.S., U.S. academia, private universities, etc., etc.) when researching, writing, and theorizing about a region that has been affected so deeply by U.S. foreign and economic policies and interests, as if cultural imperialism were not part of the neoliberal agenda. I do find that it would be so important if U.S. Latin Americanists stopped thinking and writing about Latin America as if they were in a non-place, and critically accounted for their own loci of enunciation and the risks of academic colonialism. Even thinkers that identify themselves as part of the decolonial turn seem to write from this sort of "non-place." The impression is that very little if any consideration is given to Latin American research and critical thought, so Latin America is indeed being constructed and imagined through the imperial lens of U.S. academia.*

*Some of us are constantly trying to filter concepts and critical discourses that are not at all sensitive to local realities. This is part of why I insist in the essay I wrote for your volume and in other recent essays that we all need to be critically aware of the imaginaries we deploy in our analyses, given that we are caught in an oscillating relationship between the institutional and the imaginary.*

Did the racial dialogue in the United States have something to do with how you analyze Latin America? To what extent is this dialogue explored in Argentina? How do your students react to it?

*Yes, of course. I lived in the U.S. for almost twenty years. I cannot say that institutionally the problem of race was present as something to be discussed. There were, of course, affirmative action policies that did shape the ethnic and sex/gender landscapes of, for example, my college experience (I went to Rutgers for undergrad). I think “race” was more present as relations and as experience for me. Racial diversity was part of my life in the U.S.; this is something that I perceived from an immigrant perspective. Edward Said would call it “a counterpoint experience.” Having moved from a mostly white and mestizo region of Argentina (River Plate region), the contrast with central New Jersey and later West Philadelphia was always noticeable for me. The visibility and explicitness of racial relations in the U.S. made me aware of the negation of race and racial difference in Argentina, where racial formations were very different than in the U.S. I try to share with my students this awareness and work against the grain of the negation of race in Argentine imaginaries, by exploring the construction of cultural imaginaries (I concentrate on art and literature, but I work openly with other expressions). I compare race and racial dynamics to those pictures from the nineties called “Magic Eye.” When you looked at those pictures, in appearance they were just a bunch of dots, but if you looked long enough the eye would adjust its focus and a three-dimensional image would appear, and then it was almost impossible not to see it. Students react very strongly to discussions on racial dynamics, sometimes from very personal places, and it is incredible how quickly they can adjust their critical mindsets to incorporate race as part of the landscape of sociocultural and economic dynamics. Because university is free and public in Argentina and access is guaranteed universally (so far; we will have to fight to keep it so), I do pose the question in class of why the university population remains mostly white, middle and upper middle class. What are the symbolic walls that keep poor, brown students from imagining themselves as professionals or as part of the community to which they (my students) belong? Many students are involved in political activity and community outreach through university programs, so this is a very relevant question for many of them.*

I asked Dr. Catelli about Jorge Majfud’s classification of the Latino as a U.S. invention. This process was transformed, in the words of Majfud, “*en una bandera de reivindicación, porque nosotros (los otros) hemos entrado en un juego que no inventamos y hemos aprendido a jugar para no sufrir las consecuencias de la derrota absoluta.*” For Catelli, Majfud’s words rang true.

*Yes, I think it’s common and I agree that those “flags” of identity, reivindicated with pride by the Latinx community, are specific to the U.S. But identity politics are a dangerous game to play when loci of enunciation are not made specific, like I said before. Identity politics can run very close to essentialism and miss the depth of power dynamics and historic contingency. This is why I insisted above that Latin Americanists in the U.S., among which I include Latinx scholars, should not take their identity as ethical guarantees and*

*really begin to examine their privilege, their locus of enunciation, and their part in power relations. Your volume, by focusing on an inclusive dialogue and through this collective epilogue, shows an interesting move and an awareness in that regard.*

The cross-pollination of ideas that flow across borders, influence and reshape identities is nothing new. Among Mexicans it has a long history. Some argue that the *Corrido*, which is among the most popular forms of music in Latin America, was created in the Borderlands, an area of conflict over land and culture. While Catelli and Majfud speak of the unique geopolitical matrix of Latinx identity in relation to Argentine and Uruguayan identity, within Latinx communities there exist multiple layers. To the Mexican, the pocho is Mexican only in his physical traits. Pochos are typically second- or third-generation U.S. citizens of Mexican ancestry. But American racism has segregated them and assimilation has made them English-language dominant. Yet the culture emanating from these communities lies in a place between spaces. That vibrant place created an identity not quite *gringo* and not Mexican. Mexican American or Chicax culture has influenced Latinx communities far and wide. Mexicans represent about 60 percent of the migration to the United States from Latin America. Chicax culture has entered the mainstream and has heavily influenced Mexican youth both in the United States and in Mexico. Américo Parades, pioneer of Borderlands cultural theory, paved the way toward an understanding of a new borderlands culture, but he also had the idea of “greater Mexico,” which connects the new and the old and viewed the evolution of Chicax culture as part of the flow of Mexican culture across borders. But there still exists the disconnect between Chicax and Mexican culture. Paloma Martínez-Cruz, who writes about the pocho experience as a site of resistance to linguistic imperialism, has hopes for a more nuanced understand among these related communities.

### **Paloma Martínez-Cruz**

*I think that linguistic shame marks migrant experience, and is reflected in subsequent generations and articulated as a “loss” of culture. I am hopeful that an understanding of the history of coloniality, class, race, and gender in literature and other forms of communication will allow people to replace this notion of that which is “lost” with a greater sense of being whole, aligned, and enfranchised participants in a geopolitical process that has claimed them as its denizens.*

Latinx culture in the United States is as varied as the nations which make up Latin America. But the influence on U.S. culture is profound. To a large extent, I wanted this book to explore the subjectivities of Latin American/Latinx culture. I saw in Umi Vaughan’s writing an opportunity to hear from someone who delved into Latin American music from a very unique place, that of the African American experience. What was it about Black Latin America that attracted him? I wondered if his topic gave him the chance to explore something unique.

### **Umi Vaughan**

*As a child, I learned Spanish in school, but I did not have direct exposure to Afro Latin folks. In my house, I heard salsa music and saw Celia Cruz on television from time to*

*time, but I was not fully aware of the African presence in Latin America. My first real experience, the one that opened my eyes and focused my journey, was in Mexico—one of the last places that comes to mind for most when thinking about Black culture. On a Morehouse College summer study abroad trip I traveled to numerous places in the Pacific coast region known La Costa Chica, known for its sizeable population of Black Mexicans. There I met a black Trinidadian priest named Father Glyn Jemmott, an African American scholar Bobby Vaughn, an Afro-Mexican cultural activist, Donají Méndez Tello and had encounters in several black communities that taught me a lot about the African legacy in Mexico. It became clear to me that Africans also richly influenced other Latin American nations, and I determined to learn more.*

*From then on, I have continually traveled and researched among Black communities in other Latin American countries: Cuba, Brazil, Peru, and Colombia. What attracts me is what Amiri Baraka calls the “changing same.” Each nation, each community has its own unique twist on similar rhythms, similar dances, parallel processes. Each evolved from related but distinct historical contexts. As I move, experiencing music/dance styles like pagodão from Bahia, Brazil, Colombian champeta music, Cuban timba, and New Orleans bounce music, it feels like traveling between parallel dimensions.*

*For me the goal is to document and analyze music/dance styles that hold deep meaning and accomplish important work within and for the communities that practice them. I strive to do so in a scholarly way that swings and vibrates like the performances and performers do. Another aim is to better understand my place in the world as a son of the African Diaspora. This entails tracing the connections between my experiences and circumstances and those of “cousins” in Cuba, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, Dominican Republic, and so on.*

Culture in Latin America, and Greater Latin America, has influenced political identity in many ways. Umi Vaughan was driven to explore Latin American culture because of his exploration of the many intricacies of the African Diaspora. Similarly, for Magali Rabasa, Latin American culture goes far beyond the traditional focus on “high” art. Culture is embedded within the various forms of protest and social action. I love the fact that she writes about her participation in these events. Her study of Latin American social movements is something that she has witnessed firsthand. I was interested in her thoughts about how social movements are intertwined with culture. Have social movements—activism, protest, etc.—become part of the cultural fabric of the societies she writes about? This may sound like an abstract question, but it seems to me that political struggle against oppression has moved beyond simple political issues. If so, how is this expressed? Has it influenced art, literature, music, lifestyle, etc.?

### **Magalí Rabasa**

*I think that the social movements I engage with are very much a part of the cultural fabric of their societies. This is perhaps most clearly explained through a shift in language away from “social movements” as contained, identifiable groups of people, coalitions or organizations towards the notion of “societal movement” (Luis Tapia) as a means of accounting for the way that politics, activism, and protest become more widespread and enmeshed in quotidian patterns and practices, and in social relations that connect people at all levels, be it of the family, the neighborhood, the workplace, the school, the city, the street, etc.*

*It could be said, then, that “politics” is not understood as being the domain of specific groups or identities (adults, organizers, politicians, academics, bureaucrats, etc.) but rather as the more generalized and dispersed fields of antagonisms and tensions through which the social is reimagined and transformed. This is why I see the kinds of “politics” that propel the movements (anti-capitalism, autonomy, anti-racism, feminism, etc.) in all facets of life: work, education, land, housing, art, media, and communications.*

*For example, as I explore elsewhere, the books that the movements produce are not simply the vehicle for the transmission of ideas about anticapitalist and autonomous struggle. Through their form (low-cost editions) and their processes of production (spaces of collective theorization, cooperative print shops) and circulation (alternative book fairs, non-commercial distribution networks), they actually materialize the very ethics (horizontality, mutual aid, collectivity, etc.) the texts (grassroots political theory) communicate.*

Social movements are growing to include transnational actions. The literature, art, and even the methods used to organize have crossed borders and have contributed to the Bolivarian idea of a unified Latin America. But to indigenous communities, the idea of Latin America itself carries with it a very negative connotation. To Enrique Salmón, his people, the Rarámuri of Chihuahua, Mexico have more in common with the Apache and Navajo of the U.S. Southwest than they do with mainstream Mexico. In his book *Eating the Landscape*, he wrote about how oral traditions of traditional foodways allowed various indigenous groups to combat colonialism. I asked him if the Mexican government was persistent as the U.S. government in trying to eradicate Native traditions. Were there any traditions that were lost? How does migration affect indigenous culture in Mexico?

### Enrique Salmón

*When we were first discussing my writing something for the volume, I mentioned that indigenas today do not really think of their communities as part of the geopoliticized concept of Latin America. Most do seem to recognize, however, that we are part of a pan-indio community that exist between the U.S.-Mexico borderlands south down to Tierra del Fuego. In addition, there is also the recognition that we are related to and share similar political and social issues that are experienced by indigenous people north of the U.S.-Mexico border. I think that the notion of Latin America has become a politically convenient term that is being used to further separate the oppressed Global South from the North, which also separates indigenous communities from each other.*

*Remember, prior to the emergence of the Mexican state, the Spanish Crown had had three hundred years of destroying entire cultures, converting and exposing millions to Catholicism, introducing European foods, and creating José Vasconcelos’ “la Raza Cosmica” of mestizos. By the time the Mexican government assumed political authority from Spain in 1821, there were only pockets of indigenous communities that had held onto most of their pre-Columbian languages, cultures, and oral traditions. There was really no concerted effort to completely “eradicate” indigenous traditions since the majority of Mexicanos were themselves part indigenous. There were and still are events that have caused the Mexican government to control indigenous populations, i.e. Yaqui communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the Zapatistas beginning in 1994. As a result, many traditions were lost. There are endemic foods such as panic grass that are no longer grown and eaten. The rich oral traditions of the Yaqui, Mayo, and Pima Bajo*

*were deeply compromised and are nearly totally gone, and in the south, entire communities of indigenous peoples are being forcibly removed from ancestral lands which threatens their library of traditions. One of the ways that indigenous peoples have adapted to force removal has been to migrate either to large Mexican cities or to head north to the United States. Removed from their lands oral, food, and linguistics traditions quickly erode with successive generations.*

Dr. Salmón is clearly concerned about how colonialism, both historic and modern, affects the maintenance of indigenous culture. In many cases, an adherence to traditional ways is a decolonial tool, in which the strands of colonialist identities are stripped away. Nevertheless, culture is inevitably influenced by the cultural forces of mainstream society. I asked the Mayan scholar Gloria E. Chacon if she sees a major difference between indigenous identity in the United States and in Latin America. Has identity played a role within indigenous literary movements? I was curious because I notice major differences in how U.S. and Latin American society identify indigenous identity or indigenous people in general. These issues recently came up when a student asked me if it is possible to be biracial and indigenous in Latin America, like you can be in the United States.

### **Gloria E. Chacon**

*I do see major differences between indigenous identity in the USA and Latin America. For one, because nation-states have predominantly used indigenous languages as the defining marker of identity, and it continues to be an important attribute to indigeneity. Indigenous writers and other intellectuals—who are also bilingual—articulate that language serves as a vehicle to an indigenous way of being and seeing the world. That said, the reality of language loss is not lost to indigenous writers and other intellectuals. I think that is why for many—certainly not all—there is an urgency in establishing readers in indigenous languages. This entails teaching others how to read and write in their native languages since most have been schooled only in Spanish. Yaxnaya Aguilar, a Mixe linguist, points out that the rubric of indigenous languages conflates a diverse group of languages and cultural universes that sometimes can be as different as Chinese and Nigerian. She points out that the only commonalities that indigenous nations and languages share is that they were colonized by the Spaniards and that they are now under a nation-state. This is true. At the same time, these facts alone offer insight into what we may term indigeneity because colonization and the establishment of nation-states initiated a process that has led to cultural, linguistic, and territorial loss. Indeed, that's what we share.*

*As to your question of biracial identity and indigeneity, the historical separation of indigenous peoples from the rest of the populations through the Republic of Indians and the Republic of Spaniards lent itself to some cultural and linguistic autonomy for many indigenous communities which also meant that outsiders were maintained at a distance. This, of course, does not mean—at least in my experience—that there are less mixed-race people. Again, what seems to matter is language. I know some indigenous peoples whose physical attributes would be considered European (i.e., blue or green eyes, maybe even blonde hair), but who speak Maya and see themselves as Maya. I see something similar with indigenous peoples in the Caribbean coast of Central America who have physical attributes we may see as African, but they speak an indigenous language and consider themselves indigenous.*

*Recently, I have seen a more open discussion about racial mixture, and it seems to be becoming more and more from indigenous women who acknowledge a more culturally diverse background. Adding to this new aperture is the role of immigration. More second and third generation indigenous kids are also returning to their communities even though they may not speak the language. I believe that indigeneity is a political position, but also an affective one.*

Language is so important to culture yet we see a major movement in Latin America, and the United States, centered on the idea of a “decolonial” project. I see more mestizos abandoning aspects of Hispanic culture, especially Catholicism, and moving more toward indigenous worldviews. I may be wrong, but it seems that many Latinxs with Mesoamerican origins gravitate toward Azteca or Mayan. How do you see this process and how it has affected literature? Is this an elusive quest? Is this a transitory phase toward decolonial healing? Do you think it adds a new element to indigenous literature/identity?

*Yes, I agree. I also want to clarify that just because someone has indigenous origins or speaks an indigenous language does not automatically mean they are decolonial in practice. Indigenous peoples in Latin America struggle with this, too, because colonialism permeates everything. I see that the decolonial process for Latinos with Mesoamerican origins affects this literature, because we are thirsty to engage with this corpus. I have to say that was in some ways my experience. I also see it in my students. After reading, a Maya or Zapotec novel—even if it is in translation—they want more. Getting close to indigenous worldview is not an elusive quest. I think it is part and parcel of trying to imagine a world outside colonialist precepts. This directly affects indigenous authors because they get more exposure, they see their work as moving beyond their own communities and nations. More than anything, I think this process teaches us that indigenous identities are not monolithic or one-dimensional, and that we experience indigeneity differently. Some communities have suffered more language and cultural loss than others. This is real. The fact is that all indigenous languages are in peril of disappearing. I think it is exciting that Latinos take an initiative of learning an indigenous language. I definitively tried to learn a Maya language. We need more dialogues between Latinos and indigenous peoples, both North and South.*

Truly Latin America is a complex subject without a definitive set of boundaries, identities, or even languages. The idea of greater Latin America more adequately explains how borders expand while at the same time creating cultural linkages among distinct societies. Culture must be seen not only as pure, aesthetic beauty of forms of art, but also as forms of resistance to multiple forms of colonialism.