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Queer Turns: NACC XLV and the Call to “Queer the World in a Lot of Different Ways”\textsuperscript{1}

Linda Heidenreich

Before addressing the context and content of the Proceedings for the 45\textsuperscript{th} annual meeting of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies I must take space to extend a great thank you to Drs. María González and Francisco Villegas for all their fabulous work in helping to edit this collection. 2018 marks the year that NACCS shifted to having an editorial board not headed by the Chair of the organization; having a great team made the transition smooth and the work rewarding. Thank you as well to Kathy Blackmer Reyes and Julia Curry Rodríguez for all they do for NACCS and to the NACCS board (Aureliano María DeSoto, Karleen Pendleton Jiménez, Lilia Soto, Chalane Lechuga and Ernesto Colín, María González and Francisco Villegas) for a productive year. Sobre todo, thank you to all who made the journey to NACCS 45 to present work, critique work, and move each other forward. Your open and honest collaboration—our open and honest collaboration—makes us stronger as scholars and as an organization.

The forty-fifth gathering of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies brought together over 300 scholars from north, south, east and west to share our scholarship, to network, and to carve out new paths in our institutions, communities, and nation. While we continue to work and struggle within a culture of backlash, Dr. Aureliano M. DeSoto, with his theme of The Queer Turn, called us forward:

… The Queer Turn functions as a double entendre, referencing both the influence of LGBTQ and feminist analysis and thinking on Chicana/o/x Studies, as well as the peculiar and profoundly disturbing political moment we find ourselves in almost two decades into the 21st century. As old shibboleths, practices, and customs wither and fall away, we are entering, in conflict and collaboration, a different moment with other, emergent values and truths, both good and bad.

However, like any crisis point, this one too offers us the opportunity, if we choose to take it, to create and foster ameliorative transformations of our
world. We must see the seemingly imminent crises and devolution of the post-war American Imperial State as a moment of productive fracturing and rebirth, even if, at times, this is not the natural emotional reaction to the increasing rhetorical, structural, symbolic, and literal chaos, violence, and disorder we have been living through for the past 24 months.2

Indeed the past 24 months were months of “chaos, violence, and disorder.” Some of the chaos was/is fueled by a government official who normalized hate speech, misogyny and xenophobia.3 The toxic effects of the 2016 election continue to be felt on our campuses and nationally. Immigrant communities have become hyper-vulnerable and men, women and children of color continue to be targets of hate crimes and police violence. In 2018, “at least 40 people in the US and Canada were killed by individuals who were either motivated by or attracted to far-right ideologies.”4 Twenty-six transgender women and gender nonconforming people were murdered, 82% of whom were people of color.5 On college campuses hate crimes spiked. While the four years preceding the 2016 election colleges averaged 970 reported hate crimes a year, in 2016 the number increased dramatically to 1,250.6 And for all of us the frightening and violent image of children in cages remains seared into our hearts and minds; after surviving the ordeal of crossing the US/Mexico border, thousands of children were viciously torn from their parents.7 The election of a man who bragged of assaulting women and who actively fueled xenophobia brought out the very worst characteristics of many US citizens and exacerbated a toxic climate fed by decades of violence: police violence, economic violence, spirit violence, environmental violence, and domestic violence.

Amid this violence our communities continued to push back, to “create and foster ameliorative transformations of our world.” On my own campus when racist students built a “Trump wall” hundreds of students from a multiple campus groups mobilized to send a stronger message, dwarfing the attempted statement of exclusion.8 Local faith communities stepped up their efforts to protect the environment, and several came forward to aid students in supporting Sanctuary networks. They made an extra effort to welcome immigrants and refugees. At the national level Sanctuary cities continued and continue to push back, protecting immigrants and refugees and, at times, winning in the courts.9 In our classrooms, communities, and in the streets we continue to fight for immigrant and refugee rights, economic justice, and a world where all people can live authentic lives.10 Much of this work, to-date, is responding to the violence of our time and thus we have much work to do. Responding, we know, is not enough; we must answer the call of today’s Zapatistas to “create new worlds.”11
We know this country is not new to chaos and violence. At the turn of the last century, native-born white Protestants raged against the influx of Eastern European immigrants and the great migration of African Americans to the north. The Ku Klux Klan revived as white Protestants of northern European descent reacted to the demographic and cultural change of their time. “Between three and six million native-born Protestant white men” and half-million white women joined the Klan. Federal legislation in the form of the Immigration Act of 1924 was a direct product of that backlash: a frightened majority pushing back against the inevitable and already real change within which they lived. Then, like now reactionary movements targeted public education, waging “cultural warfare on behalf of white, native-born, Protestant public schools.”

Similarly during that great economic downturn known as the Great Depression, Mexican and Chicanx communities were targeted and scapegoated. Congress appropriated funds for repatriation campaigns, and efforts to deport Mexican nationals increased with federal, state, and local governments coordinating their efforts. Throughout the US Mexican citizens as well as Chicanxs were forced, often times under threats of violence to leave their homes. By the close of the decade hundreds of thousands of Mexicans, Latinx and Chicanxs had lost their homes and livelihoods. Yet even amid this violence Mexican, Chicanx and Latinx communities continued to organize and push back. The 1930s were also an era of active mutualistas and labor organizing with activists like Emma Tenayuca and Manuela Solis Sager taking risks and dreaming new worlds –activists who continue to inspire us today. We draw inspiration from our antepasadas/os/@s, from our colegas, compañeras/os/@s and from our students. Together we engage a moral imagination that, amid a world of toxic chaos allows us to dream, envision and create new worlds. The Queer Turn is central to those new worlds.

Some would argue that, for NACCS, the Queer Turn, began years ago—and so it did. Critical queer watersheds weave in and out of our past as reminders that the Queer Turn was fought for and continues to be fought for amid resistance from without and within. Our history of queer turns at NACCS is, not coincidently, one of nepantlan movement with destructive and creative energy, motion, and action giving rise to productive and life-giving, critical spaces.

As Chicana historians Emma Pérez and Deena González have noted, the path-breaking work of the 1980s was met with openly hostile resistance.

NACS 1981, UC Riverside, “González and three other openly gay panelists bravely brought Chicana lesbians and Chicano gay men to the forefront.
NACS 1983, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Gloria Anzaldúa, Deena González, and Emma Pérez presented their work. Again openly lesbian scholar-activists were faced with open hostility.

While the aggressive and violent response to this work created a tangibly toxic environment, the work stands out as critical queer turns making possible the motion-change of today’s scholar activists. In this climate of push-back the first Chicana Plenary was held and Chicana Caucus was established with an explicitly anti-sexist and anti-homophobic agenda.

Building on the struggles of the 1980s, the 1990s birthed multiple and diverse queer sitios within NACCS. NACCS 1990 again saw push-back when Chicanas sought to create a sitio where Chicana sexuality could be addressed from a lesbian perspective. It also saw critical movement forward with the founding of the Joto Caucus in 1992. In his 2001 recollection of its history Raúl Coronado Jr. noted the movement of the time, with word of the Chicana Caucus spreading throughout our multiple networks, and the numbers of out jotería presenting their work at NACCS steadily increasing:

I was twenty years old, a member of the feminist and queer-friendly MEChA at UT Austin, and was attending my first NACCS conference. Deborah Vargas (former chair of the Lesbian Caucus) and Sandra K. Soto were then undergraduate Mechistas at UT as well, and had told me of the recently created Lesbian Caucus. Naturally, I was quite excited at the idea of meeting other queer Chicanas/os. But to my disappointment, there was no scheduled meeting for a gay male caucus. Don’t get me wrong. There were many queer Chicanos at that conference. That was also the year that Tomás Almaguer and Ramón Gutiérrez were on a panel on Chicano masculinity.

Coronado posted a sign asking “Where are all the jotos?” and called a meeting. “About ten men showed up,” and Dennis Medina suggested calling the not-yet-official caucus the National Association of Latino Gay Academics and Activists (NALGAA), previously the acronym of the National Association of Latina/o Gay Activists. At San José the following year a number of queer Chicanos put forward a resolution to officially establish the caucus and the NALGAAs met as recognized caucus at the Chicago meeting in 1995. NALGAAs changed its name to the Joto Caucus that same year to clarify that they were not a separate organization from NACCS.

The activism of the Lesbian and Joto Caucuses was met by activism on the dance floor. As noted by Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez, “An early
political intervention of the Joto Caucus and the Lesbian Caucus (now the Lesbian, BiMujeres, and Trans Caucus) of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies was to claim space on the floor at the annual conference’s Gran Baile.” They recall:

Over the years some same-sex couples became fixtures at the dance…. By the time the Association discontinued its tradition of the Gran Baile queer couples mostly felt fully accepted there, although we sometimes wondered what the local musicians were thinking and the occasional straight woman still wondered why so many men were dancing together when there were single women available as partners.25

By the twenty-first century NACCS had experienced multiple Queer Turns. Pushback continued, at times vicious, at times thinly veiled, and the diverse perspectives that we, as jotería brought and bring to NACCS often resulted in fierce motion-change among ourselves. Yet here we stand, amid this change and the move forward due to the hard labor of the queer scholar-activists of past decades and of the generations before us. Like Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano, many of us remember sitting in the banquet room at NACCS 2001 as Cherrie Moraga was honored with the NACCS Scholar Award. In “Poetry of the Flesh,” Herrera later wrote powerfully of his experience: where Moraga “honored the queer brown men we lost due to a pandemic that attempted to decimate generations and admonished their non-queer brothers who saw it happen—calling on them to turn to the young jotos in the room and recognize us as their brothers,” he noted “It was during this speech that I learned my lineage. In that moment, I realized what the poet Marvin K. White says, ‘We don’t just appear, we come from somewhere.’ It was in Moraga’s words that I came to understand that these queer brown men are my forefathers.”26

While Yolanda Broyles González was honored by the organization in 1996, it was not until the twenty-first century that many from the generation that carved queer paths were honored with the NACCS Scholar Award: Cherríe Moraga in 2001, Gloria Anzaldúa in 2005, Norma Alarcón in 2011, and Rusty Barceló in 2012.27 At times the recognition was very bitter sweet: Anzaldúa, so viciously attacked by homophobes in 1983, and whose work inspired and inspires and sustains so many Chicano scholars and activists and scholar-activists was recognized with the award posthumously.28 Differences and disagreements within our communities while painful were sometimes beautifully productive. In 2007, following difficult dialogues, including a daylong workshop titled “Difficult Dialogues,” the Joto Caucus and students, activists, and a certain fabulous faculty member in Las Vegas, joined efforts to host “Towards a Queer
Homeland: Bridging Communities and Resisting Hate.” Such collaborations formed the roots from which the Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship (AJAAS) grew.29

Indeed the multiple and varied queer turns which brought us to NACCS XLV, in their creative movement, motion-change, and nepantlan birthing of new generations with new multiple and varied dreams demonstrates that by 2018 we, the members of NACCS, were well overdue for a celebration of the Queer Turn. While this brief note addresses only the structural changes within the organization, the scholarship produced by our membership continues to fill volumes.30

The wealth and richness of the work presented at NACCS 45, The Queer Turn, then should be of no surprise. From the Opening Plenary where Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano pushed and prodded us:

Queer-inclusive scholarship should set amygdalas on fire as you resist the push, the tug, the prodding of the boundaries of your imagination. Queer-inclusive scholarship should hurt a little, it should be hard, because making the world larger is hard. And what is the point of scholarship if not to make the world larger?31

to Dr. Rosaura Sánchez’s Scholar Award Speech where she reminded us that Chicano Studies is “a field in which one can write and lecture against the grain…. Saying and writing what is not ‘in,’ what challenges dominant opinion, what has not been said, what has been erased, that is what we are here for,”32 NACCS XLV reminded and reminds us that there is much work to be done. The turns must continue.

In this collection you have a sampling of the variety and breadth of work presented at NACCS XLV. Part One, “Roses,” consists of two pieces: Rosaura Sánchez’s NACCS Scholar Award Speech, and Mari Castañeda’s plenary address “The Future of Chicanx/Latinx Community-Academic Praxis in the Neoliberal University.” Both pieces call us to action. Dr. Sánchez reminds us of the legacy on which we are building, that our work is possible because of the activism of the generations of scholar-activists who came before us and that “At its best, Chicano Studies has both an educational and political mission; this twofold mission and commitment is something that we all must support if we are to continue to have relevance both within and without the academy.” In relation, Dr. Castañeda calls attention to the challenges of the neoliberal turn in higher education while focusing on the work that is being done that insists on liberatory education. Castañeda highlights the present and the future of Chicanx/Latinx
community-academic praxis in which scholar-activists such as Claudia Evans-Zepeda of California State Fullerton, and Jonathan Rosa of Stanford University continue to engage.

“Beware of the Rain,” Part Two addresses struggles, often violent struggles, of the past which continue to shape our present. The section opens withEspinoza and Resendiz’s “Secrets of the Raid of 41,” an excavation of the infamous raid of 1901, where 41 (predominately) wealthy gay men were arrested at a drag ball in Mexico City. Their paper engages a class analysis of the treatment of the men, equally important, it maps the mobilization of the arrest to fuel homophobia in the popular press. Louis Mendoza’s paper, in contrast, highlights the struggles but also the joys and triumphs of fierce Chicano activist Raúl Salinas. In “Memoir of Un Ser Humano: The Life and Times of raúlsalinas,” Dr. Mendoza maps Salinas’s childhood and his imprisonment at a young age. He walks readers through Salinas’s move into activism and engagement, and the powerful voice he brought to all his work both before and after his release from Leavenworth. The paper is especially moving because it is a collaborative work of Mendoza and Raúl Salinas himself. Finally part two closes with the work of Daniella Hernández, a young scholar-activist who just completed degrees in Chicano Studies and Sociology at California State University Channel Islands. Hernández’s work, grounded in the Chicana feminist work of Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzman, reminds us that femicide is not restricted to the EPZs of Juárez and that multiple factors continue to fuel the crisis of violence against women.

Part Three, “Heat,” features three papers on immigration which each address queer immigration in a different way. The two opening papers call readers to reimagine immigrant rights and immigrant lives. Jennifer Carolina Gómez Menjívar, in “Moises Serrano’s Forbidden: A North Carolina DREAMer’s Twist on Chicanx Memoir, Testimonio, and Geography,” introduces us to Moises, a gay undocumented immigrant, his family and his community in North Carolina. The rich lives, resistance and testimonio analyzed by Gómez Menjívar calls readers to turn their gaze to the rural Southeast, and to see the queer and undocumented lives and testimonies beyond the Southwest. Elizabeth Munoz’s “Who is Valued in a ‘Community Value’?” also asks us to broaden and shift our gaze—in this case, to Kalamazoo, Michigan. In her analysis of the debates surrounding an initiative to provide undocumented residents with government-recognized ID’s, Munoz points critiques how advocates use of divisive language and how that language created two categories of immigrants: worthy, and unworthy. Munoz calls on readers to move beyond discourses of binaries, especially when working for immigrant rights and lives. The section closes with a paper that answers Munoz’s call for inclusive language and a new discourse of immigrant liberation. Dr. Irene Mata’s “Invoking History: A Queer Roadmap to Liberation,” examines the video “No Papers No
Fear Ride for Justice” and the liberation movements fueled by the No Papers No Fear Movement. From the Freedom Rides of the 1960s to the activism of the Immigrant Youth Justice League, to the No Papers No Fear Ride for Justice, Mata maps the subtle and not-so-subtle weave of queer resistance throughout and which today is emerging as “a more inclusive immigrant rights movement—one that no longer marginalizes its jotería, but incorporates the multi-faceted lives of its community members.” We are not yet there, but NACCS 45 demonstrated, and as this small collection illustrates, we are moving toward a more inclusive movement. We hope our readers will be inspired to also continue the work.

We live and work in a time of backlash. As Cornell West noted just months following the 2016 election, “We live in an age, the Orwellian age of mendacity and criminality.” Yet we also live in a time of hope—of queer turns where educators continue to insist on liberatory pedagogy; where the next generation is taught that we build on the work of the giants, such as Raúl Salinas, who went before us and; that we are everywhere, from Califas, to Kalamazoo, to North Carolina to the 1972 MCI Challenger bus now known as Priscilla.

Notes:


10 From the motto of the Transgender Law Center, “Making Authentic Lives Possible.” TLC is a national leader fighting for the rights of transgender immigrants and refugees.


14 Laats, 329.

Gutiérrez, 72. Gutiérrez notes that between 350,000 and 600,000 people were deported during this time. Poorly kept records account for the wide disparity. He also notes that, for government records regarding ethnic Mexican communities at this time missing and or erroneous data is common.


Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999), 139 n.101. Here note that our organization was still the National Association for Chicano Studies (NACS). The shift to the more inclusive National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies was made in 1995 when “the membership voted to rename the association the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, in recognition of the critical contribution and role of Chicanas in the association” (see NACCS History, https://www.naccs.org/naccs/History.asp).


Coronado, 7.


28 González, in “Speaking Secrets,” notes that Anzaldúa’s scholarly activism has been grossly underappreciated (see especially p. 61).


32 Rosaura Sánchez, “2018 NACCS Scholar Award Speech,” delivered at the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies XLV, The Queer Turn, Minneapolis-Saint Paul, MN, April 2018. See this volume for the full address.