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**Karina O. Alvarado, Alicia Ivonne Estrada and Ester E. Hernández (eds.), *U.S. Central Americans: Reconstructing Memories, Struggles, and Communities of Resistance***

**(Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2017), pp. xi + 242, \$30.00, pb.**

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This interdisciplinary collection of work by US Central American scholars provides an analytically rich yet intimate account of US Central Americans' resilience in recuperating memory and building community in the face of traumatic social injustice. By using the term 'US Central Americans', the contributors downplay national identities, claim 'American' as a regional term, direct attention to justice issues in the United States and connect histories of resistance. Contributors simultaneously insist on the heterogeneity of US Central Americans, who may be indigenous, Black, women and of multiple generations and origins. To explore the cultural projects through which these communities establish presence and construct memory, contributors analyse oral histories, interviews, weavings, festivals, art, literature, film and more. The material presented bears out the editors' central claim that 'a focus on U.S. Central Americans has become fundamental for understanding diversity within U.S. immigrant experiences' (p. 25).

*U.S. Central Americans* is divided into two parts. The chapters in Part 1 focus on oral history to understand education, gender, labour and resistance, while the contributions in Part 2 examine the ways that diverse cultural projects construct memory and claim public space. The volume's introduction, co-authored by editors Karina O. Alvarado, Alicia Ivonne Estrada and Ester E. Hernández, grounds the collection by detailing the conditions that generated migrations in each Central American country. Importantly, the authors attribute migration to multiple causes, including US intervention and free trade agreements, and thus provide a much-needed corrective to the security paradigm through which US–Central American migration is currently evaluated.

Ana Patricia Rodríguez opens Part 1 by examining the experiences of 'pioneers' who immigrated to San Francisco in the 1960s and 1970s. Her account of these early migration experiences is important because much of the literature on Central American migration begins with the 1980s civil war period. Her analysis combines her own story as a 1.5 generation Salvadorean and other oral histories to illuminate the 'immigrant acts' through which pioneers paved the way for others. Pioneers provided critical labour but were still denied full citizenship, sacrifices that were worthwhile, narrators felt, for their children's future success.

Leisy Abrego turns to another overlooked group, namely women. Her chapter uses the life history of a Salvadorean woman named Marta to examine the idea that Salvadoreans are hardworking, a narrative that attributes success and failure to individual qualities rather than structural conditions. In Marta's case, despite

hard work, patriarchal violence and exploitative labour conditions precluded her achieving financial well-being. Abrego urges advocates who seek to empower US Central Americans to 'be intentional in including even (and especially) the most vulnerable members of our group in our plans' (p. 73).

Steven Osuna's contribution focuses on 'obstinate transnational memories' (p. 83) that are transmitted between generations through oral histories. Through interviews with young adults of Salvadorean-Mexican descent, Osuna finds that such memories are a source of solidarity across groups and a resource for organising. The powerful and painful stories narrated by youth comprise a 'living archive' (p. 92) that refuses to remain in the past. At the same time, given the trauma that many families experienced, silence can be a survival strategy.

Alvarado's eloquent analysis of 'the signifier of woman as a gendered shape-shifter' (p. 98) concludes Part 1. Her chapter focuses on La Ciguanaba, a mythical woman who haunts waterways, appearing to men in either desirable or horrific form. This essay engages literary traditions, analysing US-Salvadorean performance artist Leticia Hernández-Linares's poem 'The Sybil, the Cigua, and the Poetess (Conversations)' (*Razor Edges of my Tongue*, Calaca, 2002) about Prudencia Ayala (1885–1936), an indigenous Salvadorean suffragette who ran for the Salvadorean presidency in 1930 and who, like La Ciguanaba, challenged patriarchal norms. Throughout, Alvarado deploys the indigenous term 'Cigua' to decentre Anglo and Eurocentric versions of feminism.

Maritza E. Cárdenas begins Part 2 by analysing the Central American Independence Day parade in Los Angeles as a public expression of US Central American identity, memory and presence. This politically complex account highlights ways that the parade interpellates viewers as Central American, contests marginalisation, and yet potentially excludes by ignoring indigenous and Afro-Central American groups.

Hernández follows with a rich analysis of cultural productions as a form of 'working memory' (p. 144). Community-based films, murals and archives document struggles in ways that facilitate dialogue, question official accounts and promote creativity. Working memories are active and collective challenges to state efforts to conceal violence. Through such projects, Hernández contends, ghosts reappear to disrupt covert logics.

Estrada examines how a weekly Maya market 'Central Americanises' the Westlake/MacArthur Park area of Los Angeles. The market makes Maya presence visible while creating a means for vendors and consumers to reconfigure social relations in the United States, access Maya products and experiences and work around barriers imposed by immigration status. Yet, participating in the market is risky, as street vending was criminalised at the time of Estrada's study. The market is therefore a defiant practice.

Floralinda Boj Lopez's contribution analyses how traditional clothing worn by Maya women is used by second-generation Maya in the United States. The chapter provides a history of traditional clothing, detailing how elder women transmit both clothing and knowledge to youth who, in turn, sometimes create their own meanings. Importantly, the chapter highlights alliances between Maya and Native Americans, noting that it is important not to lump Maya into the national category

of Guatemalans. Like the Maya market, wearing traditional clothing resists colonial, neocolonial and neoliberal structures that erase Maya presence.

Next up is Yajaira Padilla's thought-provoking analysis of 'illegal' art produced by the graffiti artist known as Cache. Featuring chickens, Cache's murals – which are often painted without permission – explore identity, community and oppression, transcending boundaries between high art and street art. Padilla's discussion of this work highlights 'the contradictory positioning of Central Americans as, on one hand, visible illegal aliens and, on the other, invisible laborers maintained as such by the regimes of government, law, and the agricultural industry' (p. 216). Following this piece, the volume concludes with a critical reflection co-authored by the three editors.

Collectively, this anthology makes multiple contributions, demonstrating the value of scholarship by US Central Americans about their own communities and histories. While acknowledging trauma and injustice, the contributors do not essentialise US Central Americans as a suffering community but instead emphasise recovery and creativity. The volume contributes to migration theory by rejecting crisis language, shifting attention to the regimes that victimise migrants, highlighting US Central Americans' abilities to construct counternarratives and alternative spaces and proposing transborder frameworks in recognition that migration entails crossing not only national but also racial, gendered, class and other borders (see Lopez's chapter). Contributors also theorise memory as dynamic, collective, transmitted in multiple ways, a form of resistance, connected to community and identity, and configuring futures as well as pasts. The accessible nature of the writing and the broad range of topics addressed make the volume excellent for teaching – and indeed, one of the contributors' central goals is to build US Central American Studies as a field and programme of study in its own right. Appropriately, the volume concludes by highlighting areas for future research, including indigeneity, Afro-Central American communities, gender, the institutionalisation of Central American Studies, *latinidad*, media representations, migration and refugee policies, neoliberalism and security policies. The editors end on a note of hope, recommending alternatives to the security paradigm, such as listening to the voices of gang members in order to 'deconstruct their abjection from society and reintegrate them as life-affirming community members' (p. 228). In sum, the insightful theoretical innovations, nuanced community portraits and rich substantive material make this valuable collection something to savour and reread.

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