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Report on *Transformations*: Re-imagining Identity

Spanish & Portuguese Graduate Student Conference
University of California, Los Angeles
April 16, 2004

Transformations: Re-imagining Identity, the UCLA Spanish & Portuguese Graduate Student Conference, was held on April 16th, 2004. Graduate students Iliana Alcántar, Marisol Pérez, Alessandra Santos, and Melissa Strong Carrillo formed a Graduate Student Conference Committee, founding a departmental graduate student conference tradition. The result was a full day of interdisciplinary presentations revolving around the theme of identity, and how it is imagined, conceived, contextualized and transformed in the Hispanic and Lusophone cultures, through different eras and varied geographical locations. The UCLA Graduate Student Association, the UCLA Spanish & Portuguese Department, and the Spanish & Portuguese Graduate Student Association sponsored the conference, and the support of the Spanish & Portuguese Department's staff made it possible. Irene Carranza, a local Chicana artist, loaned her artwork, which was exhibited at the Herbert Morris Seminar Room, where the conference took place.

Professor Gerardo Luzuriaga, Chair of UCLA's Spanish & Portuguese Department, opened the conference, which was divided in four panels: Music and Urban Space in Brazil, Transformation through Language, Citizenship and Nationality, and Countering Perceptions. Professors Beth Marchant, Claudia Parodi, Michelle Clayton, and John Dagenais, all from the UCLA Spanish & Portuguese Department, moderated each panel respectively. The event was well attended by professors and UCLA graduate and undergraduate students. Throughout the day, panelists engaged their audience, exploring the conference's theme through a variety of lenses. UCLA Spanish & Portuguese Department's own graduate students presented as well as graduate students from UCLA's Ethnomusicology, Romance Linguistics & Literature, Comparative Literature, and English departments,

and students from University of California, Berkeley, University of California, Riverside, and University of Southern California.

The first panel, *Music and Urban Space in Brazil*, explored a variety of dislocations in identity, and how literature and music reflect upon those changes. The panelists posited a post-colonial Brazil that has undergone marked urbanization and exposure to other cultures, including the European, African, and North American impacts on Brazil, and how Brazilian identity is perceived through the country's cultural production. Identity in this context was analyzed as malleable and hybridized. The panelists also discussed how cultural performance is expressed through Brazilian music as an alternative to self-identification.

The second panel, *Transformation through Language*, was an example of the broad scope of Linguistics. The panelists presented papers elucidating how language is crucial in the development, imagining, and transforming of identity. From cultural encounters and exchanges, to linguistic interpretations and interventions, this panel offered a fresh perspective on linguistic research regarding identity formation. Ranging from linguistic accommodation and translations to geographical displacements, adaptation and acceptance, the panelists proved that languages—from those well disseminated to less studied ones—open a window to how identities are transformed.

The third panel, *Citizenship and Nationality*, posed important questions pertaining to the position of the nation-state in regards to identity. These panelists dissected the intricacies of how the imagining of identity is intertwined with national identification. From foreign imagination to borders, from spaces of ambiguity to spaces of oppression, this panel dealt with the delicate and yet profound ramifications involving identity and the body-politics versus the individual body. The papers presented here exposed identity as it transforms but also as it can be imposed, intersected, misinterpreted, and/or intruded upon.

The fourth panel, *Countering Perceptions*, provided a wide chronological scope examining how identity is complicated through hybridity in the Hispanic world. The panelists covered cultural negotiations and syncretism, portraying the changes that translations, religious traditions, labor and popular culture bring forth. That is, these presentations elaborated on the concepts of the previous panels not, however, without expanding on the notion that perceptions transform identities to the same extent that they are formed.

Ranging from colonial times to contemporary cinema, the papers in this panel uncovered cultural confluences that complicate easy notions of identity, questioning stereotypes and raising discussion about fixed concepts.

The conference's keynote speaker was Professor Norma Alarcón from University of California, Berkeley, who gave a heartfelt presentation about her own experiences among the Zapatista women from Chiapas, Mexico, addressing pressing questions of gender identity vis-à-vis political identity. Following the conference's conclusion, there was a reception where participants and attendees continued discussion. Overall, the conference was a successful event where graduate students were able to divulge their work, disseminating their ideas and thoughts about identity in their respective fields of study. The relevance of the topic, and the importance of holding graduate students conferences as part of the development of their careers, proved invaluable. The high quality of presentations and the stimulating discussions that took place during this conference attest to that.

The conference accomplished the task of bringing to fruition an extensive day of discussion about identity and imagination. To students of the Hispanic and Lusophone cultures—cultures that have circulated the globe far and wide from the Iberian Peninsula to all continents—the question of identity has always been crucial in terms of contact, contamination, dissemination, exchanges, hybrid cultures, transit, exile, and memory. During the graduate student conference, many of these aspects, and others, pertaining to identity were presented and discussed. At the end of the conference, those who attended were left with few conclusions, but with many questions, for identity is nothing if not transitory.

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