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Review of Dolores Inés Casillas, *Sounds of Belonging: U.S. Spanish-Language Radio and Public Advocacy* (New York: New York University Press, 2014)

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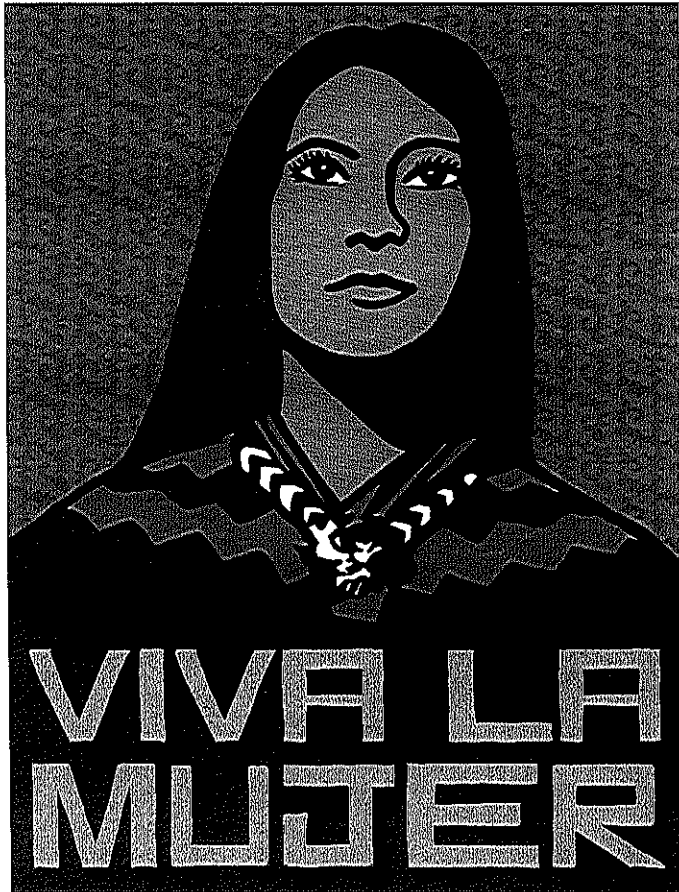
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SOUNDS OF BELONGING: US SPANISH-LANGUAGE RADIO AND PUBLIC ADVOCACY. By Dolores Inés Casillas. New York: New York University Press, 2014. 224 pages. Hardcover \$79.00, paperback \$25.00.

In this thoroughly engaging book, Dolores Inés Casillas contends that immigrants and communities of color who are excluded from the larger body politic use media and popular culture to generate belonging or inclusion. The author's thought-provoking analyses compose interconnected threads, and she develops the argument of public advocacy throughout. For example, she suggests that "radio programming . . . provides a familiar sanctuary for listeners to achieve a sense of cultural citizenship" (4) and create a collective place in the nation. Casillas persuasively argues that Spanish-language radio helps immigrants without visibility—specifically, Latino laborers who ensure the smooth functioning of American society, yet are denied civic participation as citizens—to forge community, inform themselves, and seek legal documentation. In short, the book successfully substantiates its argument that "broadcasting functions in drastically different ways for legally vulnerable radio listeners" (18).

Sounds of Belonging tells the story of a twentieth-century culture industry, one in which ethnic Mexicans demand respect, dignity, and representation by asserting their presence and bilingual voice over the populist public platform of radio. From the Americanization era of the early twentieth century to the World War II era, Casillas contextualizes early Spanish-language radio within "larger narratives of the U.S. political climate, [which are] entangled in issues of national identity and cultural anxieties over the 'place' of immigrants and communities of color" (49). She maintains that "non-English-language" listeners "sought radio as an acoustic ally," staking a claim in "the radio republic" (50). The author recounts how Chicano civil rights organizations, along with grassroots groups, forced the Federal Communications Commission to respond to community concerns. In an intriguing example of *movimiento* media advocacy, an Oakland-based student political organization in the 1970s gauged the national English-language media coverage of Chicanos.

Casillas explains the origins of rural Chicano bilingual community radio in the 1960s and notes the emergence of the United Farm Workers

community radio station, Radio Campesina, in 1983. Casillas illustrates how a separate-but-unequal system in the contemporary era discriminates against Spanish-language radio. In particular, the mainstream radio industry's listener surveys utilize outdated data-gathering methods that undercount the size of Latino audiences. In response, national Spanish-language radio officials, whose livelihood is affected by a linguistic and financial double standard, fight for ratings and, hence, economic clout in an entrenched system based on white socioeconomic power and privilege.

Probing the relationship between immigration and belonging, the author scrutinizes the labor demands of globalization, the conservative immigrant work ethic, and the false promise of the American Dream. The themes of immigration and belonging are reprised in the book's afterword, which details how popular Spanish-language radio disc jockeys facilitated widespread participation in the unprecedented 2006 national marches protesting anti-immigration legislation. Casillas's book ends in the contentious context of English-only initiatives, anti-immigration legislation, and intimidation tactics that target Latino workers who labor invisibly in agriculture, construction, and the service sector. As the author convincingly concludes, the cultural history of Spanish-language programming on US airwaves "disrupts traditional understandings of U.S. radio as both English-dominant" and "domestic" (151), since transnational Spanish-language radio "poses as an on-air counterpublic to organize, retreat, and deliberate under the radar of the dominant group" (152).

Casillas's case study investigates systemic inequality and cultural production, domination and resistance, and assimilationism and biculturalism, all relationships central to Chicano studies. Specifically, by employing radio as the medium through which to explore the theme of belonging, particularly vis-à-vis the national dialogue about immigrant rights, the book enriches Chicana/o cultural studies, which similarly analyzes cultural politics and the complexities of social identities to reexamine the nation-state and reassess US and Chicano nationalisms. Casillas presents new evidence to support Renato Rosaldo's concept of cultural citizenship, which she applies to undocumented Latinos struggling for "full membership" in US society "despite cultural, racial, or linguistic differences from the 'mainstream'" (4). Spanish-language radio broadcasts, especially talk shows, disperse information broadly. Consequently, "listening to the radio crafts a distinct aural public sphere where citizenship is . . . a personal subject matter voiced publicly by callers and experienced collectively by listeners" (5-6). In this regard, *Sounds of Belonging*, which chronicles "migrant sensibilities"

(5) and "place-making" in a sustained imagined community (150), could be read alongside Alicia Schmidt Camacho's *Migrant Imaginaries* (New York University Press, 2008), Neil Foley's *Mexicans in the Making of America* (Harvard University Press, 2014), and Natalia Molina's *How Race Is Made in America* (University of California Press, 2014) to acknowledge the cultural contributions of Mexicanos to US society well beyond their racialized role in America's national narrative.

One of the book's arguments is that radio represents "a public sphere where discussions of national, racial, and gender identities are constructed and challenged" (8). The author analyzes the sexist gendered politics of immigrant-identified Southern California morning radio programs in order to understand the "nimble" nature of Latino masculinity (107). In this case, she contends, Mexican and Central American male workers, raised on "working-class machismo" (119) yet feminized by their service labor, are wracked with "gender anxieties" (105) and denied "mainstream visibility" (112). Casillas argues that these men are "struggling to define themselves in relation to both immigrant women's social advances as well as ideals of white masculinity" (107). As a result, their lowbrow humor works to "demarcate gender roles over the airwaves" (109-10) through "on-air belittlement and disrespect toward women" (117). Casillas conducted focus groups with thirty-three women radio listeners, all immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Half "expressed their frustration" with "male-centered radio genres" (116). As Casillas clarifies, *Sounds of Belonging* "attends to the absence of Latina perspectives by allowing them to claim their space," not as "subjects of programming" but rather as "agents and active participants in the analysis of radio" (150).

Based on original content analysis of question-and-answer exchanges between disc jockeys, listeners, and guest attorneys, Casillas casts on-air community participation in Spanish-language talk radio as a town hall forum. By revealing the significance of radio to "underaccounted-for populations," including immigrant communities, she has "reterritorialized" communications studies literature, giving a seemingly "archaic medium" "equal recognition" alongside the Internet, visual media, and new media (9). In my estimation, the book honors the tradition of social scientific ethnographers such as Patricia Zavella, Denise Segura, and Beatriz Pesquera. As an institutional analysis of radio, it contributes to media studies with profound insights into "the segregated existence between Spanish- and English-language U.S. media" (3), which occupy "separate and parallel worlds," as do "their respective constituents" (149). Casillas's work complements

that of leading Latina/o media studies scholars such as Arlene Dávila (Latinos and marketing), Angharad Valdivia (Latinas in Hollywood), and Yeidí Rivero (Puerto Rican television). Moreover, the book's five research chapters connect Chicana/o studies with Latina/o studies by analyzing the Good Neighbor Policy, Pan Americanism, the US-Mexican borderlands, La Migra, and Mexican immigrant agency. The author also implies that Southern California pan-Latino (Mexican and Central American) listeners have united politically as *raza*, thereby broadening the term to include Mexican nationals and non-Mexican Latinos, as reflected by the East Los Angeles radio station La Raza (97.9 FM).

Historians might wish for a clearer explication of the story's periodization, 1922–2006, but as Casillas explains in the introduction, she traces her research subject “across the twentieth century” (3). In fact, her first two chapters, which discuss early Latin-tinged and Spanish-language radio broadcasts (1920s–40s) and bilingual Chicano community radio (1960s–80s), contain internal periodizations that trouble the monolingual, black-and-white historiography of Radio's Golden Age (1920s–50s). The author skillfully utilizes fresh primary documents from micro-archives housed at two of the first bilingual community radio stations, in Fresno and Santa Rosa, California. She conducted interviews with radio program hosts and staff from these two stations, in rural central and northern California, respectively, and also from a third bilingual community radio station in Yakima, Washington. Some scholars might try to critique an unspoken California exceptionalism, but Casillas notes early on that she is focusing on the West Coast, including the Pacific Northwest, while calling for future studies to document Spanish-language radio in the Midwest, on the East Coast, and in the South, in order to “archive the transient experiences of working-class Mexicans and Chicanos” (4).

Each chapter title and subtitle is satisfyingly informative, with four instances of appealing alliteration, and although I initially assumed that a twenty-page introduction needed an equally long conclusion as a bookend, the five-page afterword wraps up everything succinctly. Perhaps, considering that the book contains only one photograph, general and academic readers alike might want more illustrations. Nevertheless, I anticipate little static in the reception of this transmission, which is structurally sound, with ample evidence supporting its arguments. Indeed, it is difficult to quibble when the book's impressive bibliography boasts ten pages of primary sources, including archives, surveys, reports, press releases, and contemporaneous

and contemporary periodical articles and columns, in addition to secondary sources, theses, and dissertations.

Among its interdisciplinary conversations, Casillas's scholarship adds to sound studies, as it pays close attention to sound, with a keen ear for the politics of language and the “intimacy” and “inherent anonymity” (13) of radio listening. Examples of the book's concern with sound, language, and listening include references to Spanish-language radio as “an aural stage” (2), radio hosts turning “their microphones into public podiums” (3), “linguistic profiling” (7), “transgressive sound practices” (10), the “public nature of most Spanish-language radio listening” contrasted with “white-collar’ modes of listening” (10), and “Chicano sound activism” (20). Casillas is attuned to nuanced iterations and inflections in two idioms, and she describes the book as “a bilingual project,” stating, “I privilege the bilingual reader by refusing to italicize the Spanish” (xiii).

On the whole, the book addresses structural, systemic power differentials of class, race, and gender, as well as issues of nation, state, and citizenship, and it delves deeply into the complex, multifaceted nature of Chicano and Latino cultural identities. Carefully considering concepts such as exclusion, inclusion, and the body politic, it is timely and relevant, with potential policy ramifications regarding the debate over immigration reform (if only politicians would listen). Equally important, the book documents the role of broadcast public radio, including both community radio and FM talk radio, and the role of US Latinos, including their oral tradition and distinctive musical genres, within American popular culture. Ultimately, Casillas's original findings suggest a census taker's regional snapshot of political, cross-cultural communication, mediated by mass media and facilitated by cultural translators, with broad implications for a national portrait that becomes browner every year.

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