

Ethnographic Refusals, Unruly Latinidades

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Introduction

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As activist-scholars writing in the summer of 2020, we composed this introduction in a moment of despair and hope. The United States was then at the epicenter of the global COVID-19 pandemic, with nearly two million confirmed cases and over one hundred and eighty thousand deaths. As of October 2021, these numbers have only increased—despite the subsequent development and distribution of vaccines to treat the disease—to over forty-three million confirmed cases and upward of seven hundred thousand deaths. Given pervasive structural inequities in access to health care, which are compounded by entrenched socioeconomic disparities, African American and Latinx communities have experienced the highest rates of spread, infection, and death in the country. The lack of adequate testing and treatment for people who work jobs and perform services considered essential has exposed them to the disease more than it has people who have been able to work from home, which has impacted them disproportionately and laid bare the fact that Black and Brown bodies are disposable within the American racial project. And in the midst of the wildfire of COVID-19 and calls to socially distance in order to mitigate its spread, thousands nevertheless took to the streets across the country to protest the murderous consequences of policing in Black communities. The police murders of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville and the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin, reveal, once again, the institutionalized violence of white supremacy—in the guise of law enforcement—that has historically brutalized and terrorized Black communities. Black activists, freedom workers, and allies from a multitude of communities joined together in defiance, in refusal, to demand policing and criminal justice reform, in many cases advocating for the complete abolition of this system. These issues have been

paramount for activists denouncing the criminalization of migrants, the militarization of the United State-Mexico border, and the migrant carceral complex, linking anti-Black structural violences to policies, practices, and ideologies that demean and diminish the lives of immigrants and Latinx communities more broadly. As Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor has observed, the bitter anger of multi-racial protesters in Minneapolis and beyond runs deep and reflects “the sense that the state is either complicit or incapable of effecting substantive change.”¹

We had glimpses of this bitter anger in the wake of yet another act of violence in the summer of 2019, when a gunman, acting on the basis of hateful rhetoric proclaiming an alleged “Hispanic invasion,” killed twenty-two people in a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, on August 3. This event not only reflected what journalist Jorge Ramos described as a “massacre foretold”—given then-president Trump’s consistent xenophobic attacks on migrant and ethnonationalist attacks on Latinx communities specifically—but was also a consequence of what anthropologist Leo Chavez has referred to as the Latino Threat Narrative, or the pervasive idea that Latinxs are an “invading force . . . bent on conquering land that was formerly theirs . . . and destroying the American way of life.”² While the rhetoric of invasion and its insidious consequences are nothing new, Gilberto Rosas and Carlos Martínez-Cano argue that the Trump administration’s immigration practices enacted “new layers of injustice and cruelty” that detained, punished, and killed migrants: “The El Paso, Texas–Ciudad Juárez, Mexico border is a site where . . . new zero-tolerance realities are indeed a palpable part of everyday life.”³ We witnessed these zero-tolerance realities at work in the implementation of the Remain in Mexico program, which has led to thousands of asylum seekers, largely from Central America and the Caribbean (most recently Haiti), living in tents along the US-Mexico border while more than sixty thousand were returned to Mexico to wait for asylum hearings, violating US and international law. The cruelty of “zero-tolerance” enforcement is seen in the separation of thousands of children from their parents while in detention, a practice considered “torture” by physicians.⁴

And we observed these practices once again four days following the tragedy in El Paso, as federal agents detained approximately 680 migrant workers from seven poultry plants across the state of Mississippi in the largest workplace raids in US history, ripping apart migrant communities, instilling fear, and sowing financial insecurity in households.⁵ The timing and scope of the Mississippi raids provoked anger across the political spectrum. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus criticized the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), demanding

answers about the raids' cost and source of funding. In a letter to the department, the caucus explicitly linked the events in Mississippi to those in El Paso, writing, "This raid, which is the largest ICE raid in our nation's history, is a continuation of the Trump Administration's politically driven immigration agenda and efforts to target Latino families. It is also not lost on us that this operation occurred just days after one of the most horrific mass shooting targeting Latinos in America . . . ICE raids of this scale are not conducted for the purpose of immigration enforcement; instead, their purpose is to instill fear in Latino and immigrant communities at a time when Latinos are already living in terror."⁶

This refusal to be silent and the mass mobilizations that are often criticized as unruly, excessive, and extreme connect the tragic events in El Paso and Mississippi in 2019 to the national loss and rage in 2020. What also binds up these moments is the hopeful power of collective action or what Michelle Alexander has described as "a politics of deep solidarity rooted in love."⁷

This politics of deep solidarity also characterized the nearly two weeks of protests by more than a million Puerto Ricans across the island in July 2019 that resulted in Governor Ricardo Rosselló's resignation, the first such event in the island's history. The unprecedented mobilization was a response to allegations of corruption and years of political scandals—all of which was put on display most notably through leaked homophobic, sexist, and misogynistic communications between the governor and his aides, deriding journalists and political opponents, as well as mocking the struggles of Puerto Ricans in the wake of Hurricane Maria.⁸ As anthropologist and public intellectual Yarimar Bonilla notes, these protests were historic not only due to their size and efficacy but also because of their creativity. As Veronica Dávila and Marisol LeBrón documented, protesters drew on old and new forms of protest to mobilize a range of people, including protesters "on horses, motorcycles, jet skis, kayaks, yoga mats and by banging pots. Yet it was the young people dancing provocatively on the steps of the oldest cathedral in the New World to the boom-ch-boom-chick-boom-ch-boom-chick of reggaeton beats that may have finally forced Rosselló out of office."⁹ Protests, however, did not end with Rosselló's resignation.¹⁰ Ongoing mobilizations—including the use of social media hashtag #RenunciaWanda to challenge the current governor and the proliferation of *asambleas del pueblo* (autonomous groups organized at the municipal level throughout the island)—speak both to a longer history of Puerto Rican activism and political mobilization and to what Bonilla refers to as "a time of new possibilities."¹¹

This spirit of defiance, hope, and solidarity animated the initial conversations

that seeded this anthology. We wanted to disrupt the notion that the xenophobic rhetoric and support for white supremacy by the forty-fifth president was exceptional, a view that delinks contemporary tensions from colonial histories of power.¹² In November 2017 a small group of us participated in a Presidential Panel at the American Anthropological Association meeting, focusing on ethnographic work documenting multiple efforts to challenge the ethnonationalist, anti-Mexican, and anti-Muslim policies of the Trump administration. We were subsequently able to continue this discussion with a broader group of colleagues during a week-long seminar at the School of Advanced Research (SAR) in April 2019 titled “Ethnographies of Contestations and Resilience in Latinx America,” which provided the necessary intellectual space for us to come together as Latinx anthropologists and resume our conversation, share our research, think together, and reflect on the value and future of Latinx ethnographic practice. In the pages that follow, our collectively authored introduction lays out some of the most salient frameworks, questions, and conundrums we grappled with throughout the seminar, providing a roadmap for tracing our ethnographic approach in this anthology.

Intellectual Ancestry

To begin, we are anthropologists who value the extraordinary possibilities offered by ethnography. Yet we question the practical, methodological, and epistemological constraints the discipline often imposes upon field research. To paraphrase Chicana feminist Cherrie Moraga, we come from a long line of *vendidas*; that is, we identify with those who refuse normative expectations.¹³ We are part of an intellectual community that disturbs the classic ethnographic encounter where, in the tradition of Malinowski, the detached observer—aided by so-called key informants—observes the “ethnographic other” for an extended period of time with the aim of discovering their elusive cultural patterns. Elsewhere, Renato Rosaldo critiques this expectation wherein the “lone ethnographer” learns “a culture” through the process of ritualistic encounter, subsequently attaining enough insider knowledge to render his subjects intelligible to the Western gaze (a gaze always tinged with imperialist nostalgia for those groups supposedly untouched by modernity).¹⁴ This tactic is remarkably silent about differential power dynamics between ethnographers and interlocutors—along the lines of class, gender, race, sexual identity, age, political or religious

affiliation, etc.—and has little to say about broader geopolitical circumstances revelatory of ethnographers' implicit support of neocolonial regimes.¹⁵

This traditional approach has been roundly criticized for its stilted representation, which homogenizes and objectifies the people being studied while willfully ignoring their flexibility, creativity, contestation, and refusal.¹⁶ Scholars working in interdisciplinary fields like ethnic studies—especially in Black studies, Chicana/Latina studies, and Native American studies, as well as feminist studies and Queer studies—have fashioned robust critiques of this institutionalized form of so-called classic ethnography, often by pointing out the locals' skill in representing their own norms, beliefs, and practices in creative ways that undermine ethnographers' expectations.¹⁷ In doing so, these scholars have called for an anthropology designed to promote “equality- and justice-inducing social transformation.”¹⁸ Such a perspective encourages us to reassess the contributions of those with whom we work, including collaborators whose skills are critical for our success yet receive little recognition.¹⁹ Relatedly, the contributions of “native anthropologists”—ranging from representatives of the Black radical tradition to Indigenous scholars—have generated debates regarding the politics and poetics of anthropological writing that raise vital questions around the relationship between objectivity and literary representation.²⁰ We consider ourselves and our work, therefore, as part of broader efforts to “refuse anthropology.” This refusal includes dismantling the norms expected of field research and modes of anthropological knowledge production, as a way of generating necessary and alternative perspectives that value collaboration with our interlocutors. Increasingly, ethnographers train with community members to work as insider-scholars, collaborate on the design and implementation of research, and use a variety of techniques (including photovoice or participatory action research projects), all of which allows more nuanced analyses and may lead to significant policy changes.²¹

Repeatedly, our work calls for a critical self-reflexivity that moves from rhetoric to praxis and marshals the power of bearing witness.²² Feminist ethnographers, in particular, have called for work that, as Ruth Behar puts it, “breaks our heart,” that is, ethnographies written in a personal voice, expressing the vulnerabilities and feelings we experience, particularly when witnessing abuses of power and social suffering.²³ Yet, far from a perspective that dwells on what the suffering subject endures,²⁴ we support the feminist push for transparency and ongoing dialogue wherein anthropologists commit to the people with whom

we work and engage with them on behalf of shared political goals.²⁵ David Quijada and his colleagues highlight the value of a research process that offers a type of “radical inclusion” that begins with “informed understanding of personal experiences by those being legislated upon,” which can profoundly impact the “social analysis, critical inquiry, and reform” suggested by research findings.²⁶ With these insurgent threads of critical scholarly inquiry in mind, our collection of essays explores how Latinx ethnographers and interlocutors engage in collaborative encounters in contexts of refusal, ever mindful of how power shapes those very encounters and the analyses that emerge from them and of how ethnographic research plays a role in social transformation.

Latinidades

We seek to engage carefully with complex local and global structures of oppression that shape how gender, race, class, and place are configured, reproduced, and mobilized. This contextually and historically critical lens figures centrally in the methodological and theoretical approaches to Latinx ethnography that take shape across the pages of this volume. Our use of the term “Latinx” rather than Latina/o or Hispanic is intended to signal our engagement with critical dialogues about the ways that historical and contemporary constructions of Latinidad have alternately contributed to the contestation and reproduction of various forms of exclusion and erasure associated with phenomena such as gender and sexuality, racial and class hierarchies, and settler colonialities. “Latinx” has emerged as a genderqueer, or nonbinary term in recent years that circulates widely in some contexts, yet remains relatively illegible or disfavored altogether in others.²⁷ Thus, we view “Latinx” not as a simple solution to histories of colonialism, patriarchy, and misogyny through which gender binaries and racial hierarchies have been imposed and reproduced but, rather, as a crucial opportunity for reflection on and continued reimagination of the contours of Latinidad, where the “x” may exist as a reminder of both refusal and exclusion.²⁸ We deploy this term strategically as part of ongoing dialogues with the understanding that our terminologies are inherently imprecise, contested, and—perhaps most crucially—constantly shifting.

It is also important to acknowledge particular critiques of Latinidad and how we are positioned within them as activist-researchers and ethnographers who work in our homeplaces or in collaboration and in solidarity with the communities who have welcomed us. Some of the central problems with conceptions

of *Latinidad* are the dangers and pretenses of the amalgam, or the categorical flattening of diversities and differences, which lead to various kinds of exclusions and erasures that reflect past and present racialized subjection and settler colonial structures of violence.²⁹ Similar to the ways that gender normativities have been reproduced in prevailing approaches to the study of *Latinidad*, narrow framings of race and ethnicity or intermixing have often led to the conceptualization of Latinxs as a “Brown” population located in the middle of an imagined Black-white binary. Indeed, the case for Latinx studies has been advanced as a critique of this binary and its attendant exclusions. However, this framing erases not only countless AfroLatinx experiences that powerfully demonstrate that Blackness and *Latinidad* cannot and should not be separated but also Latinx Indigeneities, which are elided in accounts that naturalize *Latinidad* as a variety of *mestizaje*. Critiques of racist, anti-Black, and anti-Indigenous thinking that have informed conceptions of *Latinidad* as the embodiment of an amalgamated “*raza cósmica*” underscore the importance of unmooring biological constructions of race rooted in eugenicist imaginations of purity and contamination from markers of cultural or racial difference. Undeniably, *mestizaje* subsumes or abstracts the Indigenous subject in ways that mimic settler colonial logics of discovery and replacement.³⁰ It carries the baggage of colonial violence and genocide and the conceits of European cultural and racial superiority as a necessary “civilizing” force that devalues Indigenous humanity and posits territorial claims as illegitimate or illogical in order to appropriate land and resources. This logic of elimination subsumes and flattens Indigenous and African difference while valorizing a *mestizaje* that privileges whiteness (and proximity to whiteness), modernist notions of *indigenismo*, and European temporalities and cultural norms—all of which braces the colonial formations of anti-Blackness and white supremacy that have historically produced the endemic anti-Black racism in our communities.³¹ Thus, *Latinidad*, like the settler colonial logics that informed its development as an amalgamated ethnic category, “obscures the conditions of its own production.”³² And while Chicana feminist philosophers such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga among others have attempted to reclaim *mestizaje* as a shape-shifting metaphorical space where cultural conflicts, intersecting identities, and painful historical and embodied traumas are worked on—if not entirely worked out—*mestizaje* is nevertheless tied to settler colonial statecraft and genocidal practices that romanticize, displace, or erase ancestral and living Indigenous communities.

The forms of difference that Latinx carries are transhistorical and move across

multiple settler nation states in the Americas. Diverse Indigenous and African peoples experienced localized systems of oppression and restrictions on their freedom that developed in particular cultural, national, and regional contexts. In the United States, *Latinidad* simultaneously signals perpetual foreignness, “undesirable exogenous others,” and the ideology of the immigrant nation.³³ The latter idea braces the immigrant narrative of discovery—the notion that migration is a matter of free will (instead of a forced choice, displacement, or a means of survival), a search for a better life, and hope for belonging within a more viable settler nation-state.

The term *Latinx*, we acknowledge, may be considered a radically conservative call to gender and racial inclusion because it depends upon belonging or claiming space within the US white settler state and makes use of its coercive categories of difference. Yet, we also hold on to our aspirations for a more just future and embrace plurality and possibility in current and forthcoming approaches to analyzing interrelations and imbrications among diverse *Latinidades*, Blacknesses, and Indigeneities (as well as Asianness, Middle Easternness, and whiteness) in various historical and emergent ethnoracial positionalities. We seek to honor the important role that calls for Black-Brown solidarity and reclamations of Indigeneity have served in the remaking of identity and in historical organizing efforts, as well as how “Brownness” continues to anchor the everyday experiences of millions of *Latinxs*, while also moving beyond the assumption that *Latinidad* can be reduced to a single, isolated position within existing racial schema. Yet, we are fully aware of the limitations of adjacent terms like “people of color” as well, which emerged as a strategic way of building interracial coalitions but also have the capacity of homogenizing histories and experiences of oppression among racialized populations. In this volume, we aim to make visible ethnographically the complexities and possibilities of *Latinx* difference, signaling toward *Latinidad* as always socially contingent, contextual, and framed by both erasures and violences from without and within, in a word, unruly.

Homework

We as *Latinx* ethnographers grapple with the complexities and possibilities of *Latinx* difference in a range of places, including those typically defined as distinct, namely “home” and “the field.” What has often been regarded as the central practice that sets anthropology apart from other humanistic sciences—long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted in places far from home with people

who are culturally distant from the researcher—is something we, like others before us, constantly interrogate. As a rule, going to the field has been understood as a personal and professional rite of passage that transforms the anthropologist into a knowledge-producing subject, an interpreter of cross-cultural encounters, a translator of difference, a writer of culture. According to this logic, the researcher travels to the faraway field and—however ill-equipped or unprepared—collects objects and knowledge about an “other.” The researcher then returns home to render this assemblage of anecdotes and artifacts into scholarly texts or exhibits largely intended for academicians and university students. Every stage of this ritual process (training and scholarly preparation, fieldwork and data analysis, and the “writing of culture”) has been and continues to be thought about deeply and critiqued. However, “home” and “the field” are relational concepts. The importance of recognizing this complexity was a recurring theme during our week together in Santa Fe. We shared with each other the challenges and joys of recognizing the ways that the field can be multisited, transnational, conjectural, or even virtual. For many of us, the field is not necessarily a remote or distinct location with clear boundaries and is never entirely separable from home. Similarly, home is not a feminized, private, intimate domain or stable enclosure.³⁴ Home as a sanctuary or familiar place that endures in memory or materially as a resting place where one feels security and belonging may be something yearned for, but never realized. Feminist critiques of home as an insular or idealized representation of domesticity or comfort reveal the multiple tensions, unequal economic and gender relations, and violences that occur within the home or in association with the private domestic space. That is to say, the foundations of home can be uncertain and unstable.

We grapple with home as a conceptual space between movement and dwelling, a homescape at the edge of Indigenous epistemologies and settler colonial ideologies, a space composed of historical memory and capitalist modernity, one that is productive of changing social and material conditions.³⁵ Therefore, a place called home—a homeplace—is not a stable location per se, but a space, atmosphere, affect, and dialectical relation always in motion, a process of building and undoing. As such, home embodies multiple tensions, imaginaries, and dislocations. Homeplaces can be uprooted and remade elsewhere and home can be constative of multiple places. Rather than existing as a definable location or protective space, home is experienced as a structure of feeling, a state of being-at-home in the world.³⁶ When home is understood in this way, fieldwork seems more akin to homework, which calls for a different level of accountability with

respect to our actions and obligations to research partners who have extended to us their trust and hospitality. Moreover, homework is an important concept for us because we are conducting research in the United States and its territories, that is, within a white-settler state as racialized people who are in turn marginalized within the discipline of anthropology.

While the distinctions between home and field, native and outsider, and self and other are often porous and tenuous, it seems that research done “abroad,” far from “home,” is accorded great value and importance in a world that demands a certain privileged mobility in anthropological circles. This particular fetishizing of research conducted far away reveals how travel, discovery, and translation—as pillars of the discipline—are in fact signatures of anthropology’s colonial origins, historical complicity with imperialism, and the designs of settler states. In the end, the notion that the “other” can be laid bare as an object of knowledge is both a liberal conceit and a colonial fantasy. The movement to decolonize anthropology and its methodologies stems from Indigenous, postcolonial, and feminist critiques of Eurocentric epistemologies, imperial modes of knowledge production, and the patriarchal gaze, as well as of liberal strategies to contain difference and repackage it to serve capitalist designs or settler colonial desires. And while the crisis of representation during the 1980s brought about some changes in ethnographic practice, research ethics, and writing, the quick fix of reflexivity (as both a methodological and an ethical stance) never fully decolonized anthropology; nor did it resolve the problem of representation. In other words, purported heightened awareness of both the differential power dynamics between researchers and participants and the implicit biases stemming from researchers’ subjective angle of vision proved to be a smoke screen, an ideological buffer, a move toward innocence that used theory as a proxy for responsibility, allowing business to proceed as usual.

The sticky colonial and patriarchal residues of history remain within anthropology, particularly evidenced in its systematic exclusion of Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and genderqueer or nonbinary epistemologies and in its willful privileging of officialized research methodologies and institutions that produce detached knowledge about marginalized communities for public consumption—that is, favoring fieldwork over homework. Given this, homework is not only a critical interrogation of home but also homebuilding, that is, doing the activist work of creating a more livable and equitable future within anthropology where we can thrive in solidarity with our research partners. We cannot escape

the fact that, as Latinx ethnographers, home is also the neoliberal institutions where we make our living and produce and disseminate research often under conditions of duress and which rely on our unpaid labor in support of “diversity.”³⁷ As our colleagues in the Association of Black Anthropologists stated in their “Statement against Police Violence and Anti-Black Racism” in addressing the murderous actions of “white vigilantes and police officers”:

We urge our non-Black anthropology colleagues, especially our White colleagues who tend to reproduce the toxic effects of whiteness in anthropology departments, think tanks, research groups, and other spaces where anthropology is practiced across the nation, to move beyond the soul searching, despondency, and white guilt that this moment (and similar other moments) has engendered. Instead, we want members of the discipline to start at “home,” to accept the ways that anthropology has been and continues to be implicated in the project of white supremacy (both in its implicit and explicit manifestations) and to lay out a clear path for moving forward. We want members of the discipline of anthropology to see the ways that white supremacy is manifest in their curricula, syllabi, graduate student recruitment and mentoring, hiring, and promotion practices. We want them to see and correct their refusal or inability to teach race, racism, the pathology of whiteness, and the banality of white supremacy; their marginalization of Black scholars and their scholarship.³⁸

In solidarity, we argue that homework is a transformative pedagogy that makes higher education more accessible and hospitable to students, staff, and faculty of color. Homework is a research methodology and political stance that demands mutuality and more enduring relationships and obligations with the communities who have welcomed us. Homework is rooted in communal notions of respect and obligation. Homework is an aspirational, future-oriented, and coalitional practice of ethnography that recognizes our research partners and interlocutors as collaborators and intellectuals in their own right and demands a deeper and more sustained personal and political commitment. Homework also precedes homebuilding in creating collaborative spaces of sanctuary for ourselves and our research partners. And as the authors of this volume illustrate, homework is also more challenging and complex because we identify with our research partners and the struggles they are facing—that is, we have personal stakes in their refusals.

Listening in Solidarity

For anthropologists, ethnographic encounters often center around the ritual of privileging the discipline's own intellectual context—an extractive process that devalues the words of “others” while simultaneously admitting to being enlightened by their insights. Generating “data” from “subjects” in this way requires placing ourselves in situations where we witness and/or coax modes of social interaction. However, in these contexts, typically the methodological tool we rely on most—the ethnographic interview—impedes us from fully apprehending repertoires of communication and sociability particular to the communities with which we work. We, however, are concerned with exploring how our present-tense social entanglement with our interlocutors contains the potential to challenge the authorial flows of textual representation, in other words, how the ethnographic self is dialogized—an understanding of which demands reflection on what it means to listen.

Listening is typically associated with the deliberate channeling of awareness toward sound. Yet, this mode of auditory attention is neither self-evident nor isolated; rather, it is shaped by culturally and context-specific sets of interpretive practices that extend beyond the sonic. Listening, we suggest, involves interplay with a broad range of nonauditory (and thus multisensory) aptitudes and dispositions that overlap with wider cognitive, embodied, and affective engagements in the course of ethnographic fieldwork, all of which implicates attention, experience, and subjectivity.³⁹ To listen, then, is to participate in a communicative exchange where we simultaneously interact with and construct our social surround, a process that draws attention to the construction of meaning alongside our interlocutors across interactional spaces of encounter. Elsewhere, Alex E. Chávez lends the research context an “ethnographic ear” as a way of understanding how interlocutors’ own stories are broadcast through the perceptual field of voicing—a concept that collapses the Western epistemological binary between the material-sonorous aspects and the immaterial-political meanings of sound.⁴⁰ With this expanded understanding in mind and with respect to the ethnographic context, listening reveals itself as an inherently political act comprised of culturally and historically situated modes of attention that circulate within social fields of meaning and experience contoured by power and politics. Understood in this way, listening opens up the potential for animating a radical project attuned to states of solidarity—a project where voices matter, that is, resonate both materially (sensorially) and immaterially (socially).

The authors in this volume advocate for listening in solidarity as a transgressive act that (1) foregrounds modes of ethnographic attunement that extend beyond the aural and thus accounts for intersubjective behaviors, feelings, and sensings and (2) assembles these multimodal attunements as constitutive of an ethical interpretive practice. To clarify further, ours is a call to transform an objectifying practice into an intersubjective phenomenal and social attunement. At once haptic, affective, and reciprocal, listening in solidarity foregrounds ethical commitments that extend beyond the supposed bounds of the methodological science of anthropological fieldwork. This is to aspire toward a different narrative than that which the discipline expects—to refuse the emic-etic distinction and locate ourselves too as racialized, gendered, and otherized subjects in our work and, ultimately, in a discipline that was never meant for us to begin with. Here(hear), we arrive at a unique and relational sensing with others (with ourselves), a latching onto that carries us along—an act both agentive and accountable, wherein our embodied presence enters into an entanglement between others' stories and our storied selves. In this way, listening in solidarity offers a way into transforming practices of translation, transcription, and writing so central to anthropological methods, which previous lauded volumes purported to accomplish but in fact never fully did, leaving much to be desired in that regard.⁴¹

Ethics

Recognizing our entanglements with the people with whom we work consistently informed the conversations we had during our week together at SAR. We grappled with questions about how we understand these engagements, the ways they are mutually transformative, and how best to represent and theorize around their complexity. In other words, how do these forms of engagement relate to questions about what ethical research should look like in anthropology? How do we write about the refusals, silences, and tacit understandings inherent in the kind of fieldwork we engage in and advocate for? And what insights can we gain from discussions not only beyond anthropology but beyond the academy as well? Listening in solidarity, acts of accompaniment, and witnessing are all practices that require specific kinds of careful ethnographic engagement and ethical responsibilities. In reflecting on our research experiences, we consciously extend the dialogues on what ethical fieldwork might look like and invite the reader to consider the forms of ethics required and expected from their own communities. And while we extend this dialogue

based on our conversations with each other and with the communities with which we work, we ask that readers engage in this dialogue with themselves and their own communities in order to more carefully direct the ethical responsibilities that guide their research. With this in mind, we propose the following concepts and questions.

Accompaniment. Both in scholarly writing and community practice, accompaniment has reemerged as a framework guiding people's actions and dispositions in the context of unequal power relations. For faith-based activists, organizers, and scholars living and working in Latin America since the 1980s, as well as those familiar with liberation theology, accompaniment is a familiar principle informing ways of being and knowing grounded in a post-Vatican II commitment to preferential option for the poor, as well as for people and communities politically and socially marginalized. Activists and scholars concerned with liberation struggles in the Americas have long been inspired by theologians like Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, with his emphasis on the centrality of "liberating praxis" as the basis for the kind of solidarity and fellowship that should define interpersonal relationships and struggles to remedy inequality, or Archbishop Oscar Romero, who flouted church practices on behalf of the poor in El Salvador, or educator Paulo Freire, who argued for and lived by the principle of making the road by walking with ordinary people as they take control over their lives in Brazil. These commitments inform practices of accompaniment, which according to human rights activist-anthropologist and medical doctor Paul Farmer is a humbling process that not only involves being "present on a journey with a beginning and an end" but also requires discernment, careful listening, and physical and social proximity with others to challenge the asymmetries of power that lead to structural violence.⁴² It is this intentional linking of the fates of differentially located people that guides an array of social justice efforts, including those of immigration rights activists, freedom workers combatting anti-Black racism, Central American solidarity activists, those involved in prison reentry programs, healthcare providers, social workers, and ethnographers.⁴³ As Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz observe, part of the power of accompaniment lies in its demand for cultivating the capacity of "making connections with others, identifying with them, and helping them . . . it recognizes the inescapably and quintessential *social* nature of living in the world. It focuses on making connections with others, finding common ground, and uniting around concerns, interests, and ideas of the people with the greatest need for profound social changes."⁴⁴ Our conversations at SAR about accompaniment

raised questions, including: Is our work as Latinx activist-ethnographers a form of accompaniment? What would an anthropology of accompaniment look like and entail? And how might our engagements with scholars in Latinx, American, ethnic, African American/Africana/Black, Indigenous, and Queer studies offer us models of accompaniment in our scholarly work as well?

How are we positioned? Sometimes ethnographers come from the community they study or share in similar linguistic and or cultural backgrounds; in other cases they may not have much in common with their subjects of interest at all. Each anthropologist will thus be interpolated in complex and divergent culturally specific ways that entail different forms of positioning, different levels of trust, different expectations for behavior—all in ways that test both our already-held knowledge and the limits of our comprehension. Moreover, positionality can certainly shift over the course of research and impact the kinds of stories we are told and how we then go on to retell those stories.⁴⁵ Our responsibility in reckoning with all of this is one we need to account for—in terms of our limitations and possibilities—within the context of ethnographic fieldwork, which also involves taking stock of people's investments in our work, the potential risks they take when participating, and how to account for that in our positioning, a process that also has its own limitations, admittedly evidenced by the scholars we have assembled for this volume.

Who benefits from our research? This question is a call for ethnographers to consider what the goals of our research are and to what extent they overlap with those of the communities we work with. Admittedly, ethnographic projects may benefit the careers of those who produce publications and receive grants for their projects, as well as advancing disciplinary knowledge, but how do they also advance the projects, interests, or goals of the communities or persons we engage with? Moreover, to what extent do we seek the input of communities with respect to what they would like to see accomplished through our work?⁴⁶

Who do we write for? Attention to the multiple audiences for and investments in our work ought to remind ethnographers of the care they must take in crafting their writing. Who are our intended audiences and, in the process of writing, how do we give credit to our research collaborators in the field? Furthermore, how do we write in ways that may reach them and benefit them? As the chapters in this volume evidence, part of this involves enacting different kinds of refusals, that is, working, writing, and theorizing in ways that escape anthropology's methodological expectations and conceptualizations of culture and pushing beyond prevailing theories about what ethnography looks and sounds like—in

spite of the ways in which many in the discipline may reject our projects, or even reject us altogether.

Refusals

To critically adopt refusal revives “the flesh of theory” and the theory of flesh.⁴⁷ This analytic animates the myriad ways Latinx and similarly positioned populations actively construct identities and claim the right to cultural expressions about their lived experience while being mindful that migrants in particular often feel ambivalent and that culture is neither coherent or static.⁴⁸ Marginalized people may also refuse to be researched, refuse to speak or to understand the dominant language, or refuse to honor international borders and internal checkpoints, among a host of *Other* practices. As Audra Simpson reminds us, refusal operates on many different levels, such as Mohawk refusal of the authority of the colonial state as well as the “everyday encounters that enunciate repeatedly to ourselves and to outsiders that ‘this is who we are, this is who you are, these are my rights.’”⁴⁹ Refusal can also operate through subterranean existence that confounds dominant sensibilities about what constitutes resistance, as in the movements and practices of the young people who called themselves Barrio Libre.⁵⁰ Thus, refusal opposes dominant orders; but it is also contestation in ways unthought, or better put, unrecognized — illegible practices and modes of being and living. Refusal includes modes of thought, ways of life. The concept speaks to residual ways of life, contemporary ways of being, and future projects of existence that desert, escape, and abandon power, underlining an always emergent, historically and materially produced constitutive outside. It helps revive what anthropologist Karen Mary Davalos refers to as a “dialogue that never was,” a dialogue pushed beyond the tensive demands of the seemingly opposed disciplinary apparatus of ethnic studies and anthropology (in our case).

Refusal occurs in sites as varied and as complex as our classrooms, as well as among populations such as our kin, be they biological or chosen. It informs our research agendas and our commitments to the populations we work with over careerist concerns. Refusal — analytically — holds that certain populations never submit. They oppose in creative, resourceful, and often extraordinary or extraordinarily subtle ways.⁵¹ They refuse the impositions of the working day, the establishment of territorialities and settler states, and other kinds of power and modes of being.

Refusals, too, push against the discipline in capturing how marginalized

populations are never just objects of research but are engaging in their own analytics: they are intellectuals in their own right; they want to tell stories of love, pleasure, as well as—or perhaps beyond—struggle and pain. Our ethnographic refusal comes from a healthy brown—taken as a subject position, not an already essentialized, colorist, compromised stance—pessimism regarding narratives of liberation and resistance that hold much sway in the discipline, so emblematic of both its deeply compromised liberal impulses and its existence as the handmaiden of colonialism. Refusal, thus, involves a “no” to telling everything.

Embracing refusal, however, should not be confused with an apolitical nihilism. Instead, refusal demands an analytical push away from normative analysis of what counts as research in anthropology, allied disciplines, and other dominant knowledge formations. And to analyze refusal itself and its myriad complexities demands a vertiginous decolonial reorientation, if not wholesale rupture with the tools of the master. It demands a queer inclusion in post- or antidisciplinary formations such as Queer, Black, Ethnic or Latinx studies. To analyze refusal, as Latinx ethnographers, stresses a deep accounting of the demands of research for the communities we work with—a reckoning with their concerns and agendas, a coming to grips with the colonial formations of the discipline, a recognition that too much academic research on Latinx and other marginal communities has become ventriloquism: they are the overstudied. Refusal recognizes, in other words, that when it comes to Latinx and similarly positioned populations, they—or is it we?—talk back, undermine, and confound (traditional) ethnographers; we talk back in the vein of Américo Paredes and Zora Neal Hurston. We are intent not on protecting, but rather, refusing the nexus of power and knowledge so that we may continue to build alternative worlds that include us.

Futures

It is this imaging and documenting of alternative worlds that the contributions to this anthology seek to highlight. In doing so, we move beyond and extend conventional discussions of agency, dissent, and resilience—key concepts not just in critical ethnographic work but in the lives of our interlocutors—to better understand and analyze the contemporary conditions and experiences of living and of refusal in Latinx communities. This requires us to imagine new analyses that belie expected theorizing, be it through listening in solidarity or other ethical investments. Indeed, as our colleague Gilberto Rosas suggests (chapter 9),

this is a call to a radical anthropology that centers what is politically, ethically, and morally just, without any clear instructions, outlines, or outcomes. This perspective is inspired by our interlocutors, who themselves are invested in an array of social projects that work to imagine new narratives and attempt to author new futures.

The chapters that follow trace how it is that Latinxs actively struggle for and creatively imagine more just and equitable worlds. This consideration opens up a broader temporal question regarding the future of Latinxs in the United States, Latinx anthropology, and Latinxs in anthropology. Yet, throughout, the approaches to futurities held both by scholars and interlocutors are open-ended—no predictions are offered, for there are no easy, simple, or readily available answers to these questions. To be frank, we do not know what lies ahead. This uncertainty, however, is where possibility lies: from Latinx youth in Massachusetts, Long Island, and Chicago who wield art and grassroots organizing as vehicles for social change; to how the question of bodily autonomy, gender, and sexual autonomy are at the center of struggles around reproductive justice in South Texas and sex work in Chicago among trans women; to how, in this same spirit, sanctuary movement activists in Ohio draw on hopeful histories of past social movements to develop strategies for political organizing in the present, while indigenous groups in Puerto Rico and New Mexico chart new genealogies that unearth occluded pasts of violence, exploitation, and appropriation in order to better understand the current moment and what may come—all of this evinces how horizons of possibility can rely deeply on the past.

Yet, the authors of this volume no doubt disturb understandings of the temporality of the present. In his foundational work, José Esteban Muñoz disrupts binarized distinctions between “future” and “present” and describes glimpses of an actually existing queer future in the present.⁵² While Muñoz focuses on performances, he also draws attention to the quotidian as a key site of future-making. Thus, the ethnographic method—with its careful attention to otherwise mundane, day-to-day happenings in people’s lives—is key to understanding the complicated ways in which past, present, and future social, cultural, and political vernaculars meet. Andrea Bolívar’s concept of *fantasía* (chapter 6) draws on Muñoz to demonstrate future-making in the present. As sex-working transgender Latinas cultivate more livable futures for those who defy gender and racial normativity, they also engage in refusal forms of being, working, caring, and space-making in the present. Similarly, Sherina Feliciano-Santos (chapter 2) reveals that for Indigenous Taíno activists, “the space of their resistance and

struggle is marked by tensions and alternatives: alternative pasts, alternative presents, alternative futures.” And Chávez (chapter 3) similarly listens to how Chicago youth challenge us to embrace what is not quite in view, to embrace the possibility of an “abstract future on the horizon, yet presently in process, that claims the here and now in time, in space, and through sound.” The array of ethnographic work in this volume, however, exudes no mere and facile optimism. Rather, it exhibits what performance studies scholar Ramón Rivera-Servera calls an “educated hope.”⁵³ He argues that Latinxs are “optimistic while maintaining a critical grounding in the materiality of historical and contemporary experience,” which results in what Muñoz calls “an alternative political affect that embraces futurity without venturing into an uncritical escapism.”⁵⁴ The social actors in this volume, too, are optimistic *and* realistic. And so, the desire to bridge the past, present, and future in ways that work toward more radical potentialities for Latinxs is perhaps, too, a defining characteristic of Latinx ethnography, as we came to realize through our shared conversations. At one point during our SAR seminar, Ana Aparicio asserted, “We wouldn’t be here if we weren’t working toward the future.” This—our “future work”—is also homework, our collective *tarea* that speaks to an impossible intellectual and political activism in the present, one that is sustained by the past and imagines and works toward achieving just and alternative futures.

With these arguments and concepts in mind, the title of this volume reflects our ultimate purpose in writing. Refusal is our analytical stance; it ought not be read as an ethnographic rendering of our observations of the actions—of refusal, resistance, etc.—that people themselves are engaging in within their daily lives. Our ethnographic refusal is manifested in seeking “the beyond” of what is often imagined in relation to the anthropological practice of ethnography. “Unruly Latinidades” refers to the way the very notion of *Latinidad* can often be narrow and constraining and to how our work illustrates and invites a more capacious, and therefore unruly, conceptualization of the term. Thus, while on the surface the concerns and issues we explore might appear to be narrowly confined to *Latinidad*, our survey of the landscape of contemporary political struggles suggests a broader range of experiences that can be understood in relation to *Latinidad*. Finally, in pairing the two, we call for an anthropology on our own terms that has substantive political contributions that—in contemporary parlance—bear the potential to decolonize the discipline methodologically, theoretically, and ethnographically. This is our way of staking a claim—one that does not elide, hide, or silence our complexities and vulnerabilities in the guise

of detached scientism but rather foregrounds, struggles with, and challenges our compromised personhood as marginalized peoples and our *compromisos* (obligations) to those with whom we work.

Notes

1. Keeanga-Yahmatta Taylor, "Of Course There Are Protests. The State Is Failing Black People," *New York Times*, May 29, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/opinion/george-floyd-minneapolis.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>.
2. Chavez 2013, 3; Jorge Ramos, "El Paso Was a Massacre Foretold," *New York Times*, August 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/10/opinion/i-fear-the-deaths-in-el-paso-wont-change-anything.html>.
3. "Witnessing 'Zero Tolerance' on the Border," *Anthropology News*, December 17, 2018, <http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2018/12/17/witnessing-zero-tolerance-at-the-border/>.
4. Soboroff 2020.
5. Similar kinds of workplace raids on migrant communities had occurred in Ohio just one year earlier. Miriam Jordan, "ICE Arrests Hundreds in Mississippi Raids Targeting Immigrant Workers," *New York Times*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/07/us/ice-raids-mississippi.html>. See also "Sen. Sherrod Brown Says He's Working to Help Immigrant Families in Sandusky-Area Raid," June 6, 2018, <https://www.cleveland.com/metro/2018/06/sen-sherrod-brown-says-hes-wor.html>.
6. Juliegrace Brufke, "Congressional Hispanic Caucus Calls for Answers on Mississippi ICE Raids," *Hill*, July 12, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/457148-congressional-hispanic-caucus-calls-for-answers-on-mississippi-ice-raid>. In addition, 150 writers, artists, and leaders also signed a letter in solidarity with Latinx communities published in the *New York Times*, *El Nuevo Herald*, *La Opinión*, and *El Diario*. "Latino Actors, Writers Pen 'Letter of Solidarity' amid Fears," *New York Times*, August 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2019/08/16/us/ap-us-open-letter-latinos.html>.
7. Michelle Alexander, "America, This Is Your Chance," *New York Times*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/08/opinion/george-floyd-protests-race.html>.
8. "Ricardo Rosselló Resigns as Governor of Puerto Rico," *El Nuevo Día*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.elnuevodia.com/english/english/nota/ricardorosselloresigns-asgovernorofpuertorico-2507862/>; Dennis Costa, "The Most Controversial

- Remarks in the Rosselló Chat Scandal,” *El Nuevo Día*, July 14, 2019, <https://www.elnuevodia.com/english/english/nota/themostcontroversialremarksinthelrosellochatscandal-2505583/>. See also Yarimar Bonilla, “Why Would Anyone in Puerto Rico Want a Hurricane? Because Someone Will Get Rich,” *Washington Post*, September 22, 2017.
9. Veronica Dávila and Marisol LeBrón, “How Music Took Down Puerto Rico’s Governor,” *Washington Post*, August 1, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/08/01/how-music-took-down-puerto-ricos-governor/>.
 10. Protests continued as the Puerto Rico Supreme Court unanimously ruled the appointment of Pedro Pierluisi as unconstitutional, resulting in his stepping down on August 7, and even as the former secretary of justice, Wanda Vasquez, was sworn in as governor later that day. William Ramirez, “After the Power of Protest Ousts a Governor, Puerto Rico Has a New Leader. For Now,” ACLU, August 8, 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-speech/rights-protesters/after-power-protest-ousts-governor-puerto-rico-has-new-leader-now>. See also Alejandra Roja, Patricia Mazzei, and Frances Robles, “Puerto Rico Supreme Court Ousts New Governor, and Another Is Sworn In,” *New York Times*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/07/us/puerto-rico-governor-wanda-vazquez.html>.
 11. Yarimar Bonilla, “Puerto Rican Politics Will Never Be the Same,” interview by Jonah Walters, *Jacobin*, August 2, 2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/08/puerto-rico-ricardo-rossello-governor-unrest>. For a discussion of the origins of the *asambleas del pueblo*, see the interview with Jocelyn Velázquez on the *La Jornada Se Acabaron las Promesas* program on Radio Independencia, episode 101, August 16, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4G73Y7YvdoQ>.
 12. Rosa and Bonilla 2017.
 13. Moraga 1983.
 14. Rosaldo 1989. We deliberately write “his,” because the ethnographer at the center of this narrative was usually a male subject.
 15. Harrison 1997.
 16. Castañeda 1996; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Paredes 1978.
 17. Arvizu et al. 1978; Paredes 1993; Sillitoe 2015; Smith 1999.
 18. Harrison 1997, 2.
 19. This polemic extends back to the origins of anthropology, in which Franz Boas (like many other anthropologists) formed important relationships with his Native American translators, which enabled him to gain insight into and expertise in Native peoples’ language and culture (Boas 1982).

20. Jones 1970; Gregory 1998; Gwaltney 1980; Hurston 1990; 1999; Hurston and Wall 1995; Hurston and Kaplan 2001; Ortiz 1969.
21. Schenker, Castañeda, and Lainz 2014; Langhout 2014.
22. Speed 2006, 71; also see Hale 2001; 2008; Hale and Stephen 2013; Tomlinson and Lipsitz 2013.
23. Behar 1996; also see Behar and Gordon 1995; Craven and Davis 2013; Desai 2013; Lamphere 2018; Wolf 1996; Zavella 1996.
24. Robbins 2013.
25. Speed 2006, 74; Hale 2001; 2008; Fassin 2017.
26. Quijada, Cahill, and Bradley 2013, 216.
27. De Onís 2017; Trujillo-Pagán 2018; Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez 2018; Rodriguez 2017.
28. Alan Pelaez Lopez, "The X in Latinx Is a Wound, Not a Trend," *Color Bloq: The Story of Us*, September 2018, <https://www.colorbloq.org/the-x-in-latinx-is-a-wound-not-a-trend>.
29. See Blackwell, Boj Lopez, and Urrieta 2017 for a fuller discussion.
30. See Glenn 2015.
31. Wolfe 2006.
32. Veracini 2010, 14.
33. Glenn 2015, 60.
34. Chawla 2014, 24.
35. See Clark and Powell 2008; Góralaska 2020.
36. Chawla 2014, 25.
37. Contingent faculty make up more than 70 percent of the workforce in higher education. Colleen Flaherty, "The Gig Academy," *Inside Higher Ed*, October 10, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/10/10/you%E2%80%99ve-heard-gig-economy-what-about-gig-academy>.
38. "ABA Statement against Police Violence and Anti-Black Racism," June 6, 2020, <https://aba.americananthro.org/aba-statement-against-police-violence-and-anti-black-racism-3/>.
39. Rice 2015.
40. Chávez 2017; also see Erlmann 2004.

41. Here, we specifically refer to Clifford and Marcus 1986.
42. In Griffin and Weiss Block 2013, 127.
43. For examples of organizations using accompaniment as a framework guiding their engagement, see Freedom for Immigrants, <https://www.freedomforimmigrants.org/alternatives-to-detention>; NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with Guatemala) and their Guatemala Accompaniment Project, <https://nisgua.org/gap/>; the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, Post-Release Accompaniment Project, <http://www.im4humanintegrity.org/northern-california-immigration/>; and the work of organizations like Taller de San Jose, which “offers accompaniment in a Mexican neighborhood in Chicago, helping service participants navigate health, judicial, and social service systems” (Villarreal Sosa, Díaz, and Hernández 2019); and Wilkinson and D’Angelo 2019.
44. Tomlinson and Lipsitz 2019, 23, 24.
45. Ranco 2006.
46. Garcia 2000.
47. See Moraga 1983.
48. We build on the notion that citizenship, a product of modernity, should be seen as multifaceted and more than juridical. Through shared social and cultural expressions, Latinxs, particularly migrants, assert their rights to space, dignity, and a sense of belonging (Bloemraad and Trost 2008; Caldwell et al. 2009; Del Castillo 2007; Flores and Benmayor 1997; Rosaldo 1994; 1997). This vernacular perspective on citizenship emphasizes people’s quotidian social and cultural practices as well as their negotiations with and contestation of power in historically specific locales (Gálvez 2013).
49. Simpson 2007, 73.
50. See Rosas 2012.
51. Chávez 2017.
52. “Queer” meaning nonnormative and liberated in ways beyond the sexual, which includes racial.
53. Rivera-Servera 2012, 98. Rivera-Servera argues that hope constitutes a theory in practice of queer Latinidad.
54. Duggan and Muñoz 2009, 287.