

Juanita Heredia. *Mapping South American Latina/o Literature in the United States: Interviews with Contemporary Writers*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 241 pp. ISBN. 10.1007/978-3-319-72392-1.

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This book reunites the voices of twelve Latina/o writers of South American descent: Daniel Alarcón (Peru), Marie Arana (Peru), Kathleen de Azevedo (Brazil), Carolina de Robertis (Uruguay), Patricia Engel (Colombia), Carmen Giménez Smith (Peru), Daisy Hernández (Colombia and Cuba), Jaime Manrique (Colombia), Farid Matuk (Peru), Julie Sophia Paegle (Argentina), Mariana Romo-Carmona (Chile), and Sergio Waisman (Argentina). Through a series of interviews with Juanita Heredia, these authors trace a map of their experiences as first generation Latinas/os in the United States. Mapping, in this sense, and as the title suggests, is the action that traverses the book.

In the introduction, Heredia addresses the urgency to study Latina/o contemporary literature through a transnational lens that examines “the global dimensions of authors who move between nations in the contemporary period” (2). She emphasizes that travel and migration should not be considered a one-way itinerary, but instead an ongoing navigation between two or more cultures. In this sense, she considers the work of the intellectuals interviewed in her book as pioneer in a trans-American and global literature trend, and points out to what extent they have contributed at bridging the distance between languages, historical time periods, and locations across South America and the United States.

While Latina/o literary tradition is fast growing in the United States, Heredia points out the urgency and relevance of examining the specificity of cultural and historical backgrounds among different groups within the Latina/o community across the country. In order to do so, she draws a core of themes, experiences and concerns shared by all authors interviewed despite the differences that might divide them. One of the shared characteristics that Heredia describes in more detail is the fact that the diaspora of many South American countries in the United States has unspecific locations or is diffused in archipelago communities across a broad territory, as opposed to the case of other

countries such as Mexico or Cuba with broader population concentrations in specific states. Such geographical dispersion translates in heritage culture being learned and enacted in the private family sphere rather than in public or among a wider community. The interviewed writers also “share certain cultural practices related to musical tastes, culinary foods, sports, spiritual practices, and more to maintain their South American cultures alive in the U.S. past, present and future” (5).

Throughout the interviews, all authors address not only their journey into and through the American culture, but also the need of building an image of their homelands, sometimes through reading literature; often through stories told by family members; or by holding on to blurring personal memories. In their efforts to (re)construct such representation of their countries of origin while building a sense of belonging in the United States, they faced the necessity of learning about historical contexts on the background of their story of migration. They all undertook an inevitable negotiation between languages and landscapes in order to generate narratives about the past and the present.

Each chapter, though an informal yet thoughtful conversation, revolves around the specific personal itinerary of each author linked to the historical background of their country of origin, as well as their intellectual formation, literary influences and relationship with at least two cultures and languages. Their reflections capture the way in which personal stories of travel, migration, education, family configuration, and cultural difference intersect with a broader discussion on transnational and hybrid identities.

While each interview focuses in specific aspects of the lives and work of the writers, they all share a reflection about what it means to inhabiting and bridging the gap between two cultures. Such experience has shaped the role and perspective of all these writers and their commitments as scholars, journalists, translators, activists, narrators, and poets. Many of these authors also analyze their multiple cultural backgrounds such as European, Jewish, Middle Eastern and mixed across Latin American countries, adding complexity to the notions of hybridity and ancestry. Even though these twelve intellectuals devote their professional careers to different spheres of cultural production, they define themselves as writers whose work is critically concerned with issues of human rights. Many of them approach their work as a form of activism regarding migration, displacement, feminism and LGBTQ+ rights. Reding the book it becomes clear that retrieving a personal and historical past is a fundamental part in the process of becoming aware, responsible and actively engaged with contemporary debates of social justice.

Through this series of interviews, Juanita Heredia articulates a dialogue among such diverse group of voices, building upon the shared experience of South American heritage and cultural negotiation in the United States. Her book is a significant contribution to the ongoing effort of mapping the contemporary and fast-growing Latina/o literary tradition. As Heredia acknowledges, the work of the authors interviewed within these pages are generating new visions of the United States and South America from multicultural perspectives and an intellectual formation inscribed in traditions that

transcend national borders and linguistic barriers. Compiling their trajectories and viewpoints, as well as addressing the cultural specificity of their work and experiences, is certainly a relevant task that Heredia has undertaken, and many will have to continue.