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Latining America

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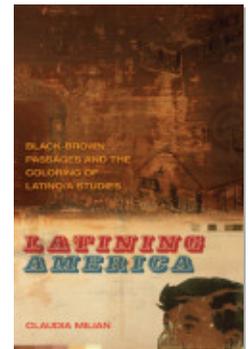
Published by University of Georgia Press

Milian, Claudia.

Latining America: Black-Brown Passages and the Coloring of Latino/a Studies.

Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DISORIENTING LATINITIES

Where were we?

—PATRICK MCGRATH (2008: 130)

Up to this point this volume has demonstrated a link in the semiotic lines of race, culture, movement, and geography. These markers have been scrutinized in ways that exceed the black-white and brown-white dyad, centering on the interchangeable and unsettled presence of blackness, brownness, and dark brownness. I have explored these concerns through the grids of the U.S. Southwest and Southeast (chapter 1); South-South black-brown reciprocal Latin passages in Central America, Mexico, and Cuba (chapter 2); North-South dynamics of problematic blackness through brownness and dark brownness (chapter 3); and now through Central America as an intellectually unmappable South in Latino/a studies. I conclude with this line of thought to disentangle and labor through emendations that I hope reframe the discourse of Latinidad and diaspora not by simply bringing Central Americans into the analytic conversation.

I wish to think through the “centrality” of the limits, by which I mean the canonical boundaries of Central Americanness as a forthcoming project, as an identity- and region-in-the-making that never quite arrive at Latinidad. Central American imperceptibility — its “disorientingness” — provides a locus for how to reorient Latinoness, Latinaness, Latin-Americanness, and Americanness. In this way, the politics and sites of the color line that were introduced by W. E. B. Du Bois in 1900 and that have resonated throughout this work are interwoven with what we can conjure as the empire line broadening the Du Boisian line in the Global South.¹ By 1904 this line had graphed —

in the language of short story writer O. Henry, who coined the “banana republic” term with the fictional Central American republic of Anchuria — such nations as Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama (1922: 132).² This is not to say that the question and direction of U.S. Latino/a studies is effortlessly resolved through the inclusion of blackness, dark brownness, and Central Americanness. Neither does it imply that intellectual engagement with these vacuities will make punitive areas of investigation. On the contrary, these chasms punctuate that the potential behind such schemas as *Latinidad* remain deferred because of the future promise through which particular ethnoracial margins from within the margins will emerge. A knotty point not yet grappled with is that the sidelines of Latino/a studies undertake movement and transformation, while *Latinidad*, as a potential site of new beginnings, does not.

U.S. Central American emergence as a Latino and Latina group echoes how the isthmus thematically registers as a placeless southern place in imaginaries from a Global North or from a Global South that may host some locales with more “northern” currency.³ As a region, Central America is cumulatively mapped in ways that connote such areas as Africa. The epigraph to Joan Didion’s *Salvador* (1983), as a case in point, carves out her account of that nation through Joseph Conrad’s depiction of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Recalling the time she lived in Germany, novelist Jacinta Escudos (2005) has written of how when she mailed letters to El Salvador, a postal worker asked her, after long deliberation, “What part of Africa is El Salvador in?” And so while I am inspecting Central American absence in Latino/a studies, I do so fully aware that blackness — in its demonstrably recognizable forms as well as in surreptitious and more nuanced manifestations — is often dwarfed from the governing discourses bringing forward Central American intellectual and cultural thought.

This chapter’s underlying claim is that Central America and U.S. Central Americans denote dark brownness not so much through the chameleonic shades of brownness affixed to Latino and Latina colorings. The heart of this darkness lies in the roles of Central Americans as guileless, rustic beings who supply the U.S. and normative Latin American world with strikingly unusual, underdeveloped, and disadvantaged “things” that disorient U.S. Latino and Latina brown bodies. This corporeality is constituted not only by the touchstone paradigm of Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Cuban American.

It also comes about through the staging of the isthmus nations—to adapt the words of fiction writer Peter Mountford—as “the cucarachas, those chronically dysfunctional Latin American countries like Guatemala, Panama, et cetera” (2011: 30). We find descriptors for a U.S. Central American population as well as a region through what Gustavo Arellano, the architect of the weekly syndicated column “¡Ask a Mexican!,” defines in this chain of command and ordered thinking as “Guatemalan: The Germans had the Irish; the Irish had the Italians; the Italians had the Poles. Mexicans have the Guatemalans—our eternal punch line” (2007: 7). Arellano’s definition is meant to be satirical, of course. But why are Guatemalans in this cultural template the indispensable subaltern Latino and Latina group that incurs disparagement? Arellano takes us to Mexico as Guatemala’s hegemonic north in this demarcation. Guatemala is a permissive site for predictive archetypes of a U.S. Latino and Latina way of life on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Allow me to explain that my present inquiry does not stage a belligerent analysis of Mexican and Central American cultural and political rivalries or polarities. Rather, my venture calls on and probes textual representations of U.S. Central Americans so as to trouble the types of Latino and Latina differentiations within the “same” rhetorical configurations that pattern U.S. Latino and Latina discursive spaces. My purpose is to illuminate a recognition of Central American forms of communication by posing new questions that tackle the deeply rooted localization of Central America and Central Americans as scions growing downward into lower modes and dispositions of Latinoness, Latinaness, and Latin-Americananness. Their disconnectedness from the Global South’s other Americas as well as wider U.S. Latino and Latina populations allows for an interrogation of how the Americanness of Central Americans, together with their Central American un-Americanness in the United States, is produced in a U.S., Latino and Latina, and Latin-American axis. Yet it is not as though the discursive arrangement of Latin-Americananness, Latinoness and Latinaness, or U.S. Americanness—conjunctural points that constitute parts of the Global South and Global North—is not irreversible. To that end, *Latining America: Black-Brown Passages and the Coloring of Latino/a Studies* has unraveled U.S. American “northernness” from the specter of its internal multiple Souths and their crossovers to other contexts, communities, and maps.

Before we proceed with this subject, the reader needs to be alerted to two nomenclatures that subjects from Guatemala and U.S. discourses on Central Americanness will take herewith: Guatepeorian and Central American–Americanness. Guatepeorian is being made to vocalize, disturb, and go through the meanings that codify and rift this nation, population, and region. Central American–American is the theoretical “appearance” in Latino/a studies, the space that works—and collides—with sloppy Guatepeorian representations to make itself known and to critically question and deliberate on what is being talked about. I analytically embark, then, on a southern journey that takes up a continental American underdog status for Central America by focusing on how the isthmus’s inhospitable southernness is charted in U.S. Latino and Latina creative imaginations. I argue that there are numerous and unsteady Souths that come into view in Latino and Latina literature: some are more “northernly” and socioculturally acceptable than others. I specifically wrestle with the oppositions that arise between Central Americanness and the southern subaltern discursivity of Latinos and Latinas. Central America’s alienating local colors are embedded against standardized U.S. American, Latino, Latina, and Latin American manners. My efforts do not aim to sectionalize, assign blame, or send tremors across Chicano/a, Latino/a, and Latin American studies. At stake is the recasting of these fields through a broader and equitable nexus of more globalized and reciprocal southern relations.

Organizationally, I explore the pathos of representing Central Americanness through an “innate” ontological basis that codifies the pathologies of civil war, violence, enduring and widespread poverty, and rural social structures. As a visual and literary experience, this taxonomy suggests the social unrepresentability of U.S. Central Americans, sharing a rhetorical likeness with Patrick McGrath’s angle of vision in his novel, *Trauma*.⁴ There, Vietnam War veterans await their social translatability and representability in the American world. But first they must absorb their psychological experiences and injuries until they can produce their own language. This chapter’s epigraph, to this extent, suggests the continuity and discontinuity of a muddled Latino/a and American conversation on Central Americans. This Latino/a script in relation to America is disoriented by the deep imprints of a Central American presence that perplexes or creates a certain cognitive disturbance. Their precarious situation in both spheres attributes temporariness, since

U.S. Central Americans are not supposed to reside in America. Nicholas De Genova and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas touch on these contentions when they cite a familial talk, wherein a baffled Mexican child poses the question, “Uncle, the Guatemalans — are they Hispanics like us?” (2003: 184). As subjects of discussion, U.S. Central Americans also disorient the casual conversation about them vis-à-vis contradictions, exclusions, digressions, shifts, resumptive, and terminations. The vernacular question cited earlier — “Where were we?” — also seeks clarification on “Where are we?” and “How are we here?”⁵

As is widely known by now, the mass Central American migrations into the United States are a result of U.S. foreign intervention during the 1980s (cf., M. García, 2006; Mahler, 1995, 1996; Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla, 2001; Menjívar, 2000).⁶ U.S. interests in Central America revolved around an effort to safeguard the region against communism, which was generally deemed at the time as an East-West struggle. Doug Stokes points out that “The central justification for this support was the U.S.’s stated need to contain alleged Soviet expansionism within Central America.” The Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations resisted making “another Vietnam” out of El Salvador. The 1979 Sandinista victory over Anastasio Somoza Debayle’s dictatorship “added to Washington’s fears of the spread of subversion in Central America” (2003: 79). In former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick’s view, Sandinista control of Nicaragua represented a “major [U.S.] blow,” one “of large and strategic significance” (1987: 14). Resisting communism in Central America signified the protection of U.S.-centered American ideologies.⁷

This chapter’s discursively disorienting Latinity picks up the baton of political and sociocultural conversation and extends it to literary constructions of a “normalized” Latino and Latina self in relation to a feckless Central American other. Literary sketchings of the U.S. Central American figure as one that intrudes on the established identity and parameters of Latinoness and Latinaness need to be assigned meaning.⁸ As follows, this chapter’s first section begins with a literary overview of the “political iconomy” ascribed to Central Americanness.⁹ This part of the discussion tallies a cultural compendium where Central Americanness morphs into a Guatepeorian iconographic state that enumerates what individuals from the isthmus should look like as well as how and where they should live. I survey how nations and peoples

from the region literarily show up to formulate my narrative and outline how Central Americans are introduced and kept at a safe distance so as not to disorient a U.S. Latino and Latina brownness. The space between Latino/a studies and Central Americanness tacitly lays an infrastructure that accentuates a standard Latinoness and Latinaness through a radical otherness inferred as a Guatepeorian Latinidad. Such craftings demand further deliberation about the orientation of Latino and Latina literature. When approaching these Latino/a and Central American specificities, one may want to weigh in on these issues: How correlative is Central Americanness to Latino and Latina literary articulations of a Global South-like discourse and its differentiations (e.g., folkways, distinctive norms and practices, food preferences and traditions, plantation economies, tropical climates, language and speech patterns, and geographic smallness)?¹⁰ Does the content of Latinoness and Latinaness create a “southern literature” that is ultimately wedded to the U.S. literary and national zeitgeist of the “Great American Novel” through the exercising of more untranslatable “southern” walks of life like Central Americanness? Is Central America’s regionalism immutably decreed beneath “South of Southern Norths”? Guatepeorianness dots the dissimilar types of southern emergence from this distinct U.S. Central American dark brown space.

The chapter progresses with a review of the discursive American horizon North and South, trying to understand what this map means regionally and hemispherically, and at the level of subjectivation, especially within a Central American–Americanness that attempts to forge an American space in the Americas. Hardly extras playing a minor part in the Latino/a studies triumvirate, modes of U.S. Central Americanness are being staged through a new analytic lexicon. This chapter studies, as a last point for consideration, U.S. Central American subjectivity through the theoretical beginnings proffered by Arturo Arias’s Central American–American framework. Scrutinizing how this paradigm might be incorporated in Latino/a studies and how it might submit to Latinidad and an “Other Latino” status, I take to task the promising directions of Central American–Americanness as a hermeneutic opening interrogating the presumed stability of Latinoness and Latinaness. Central American–Americanness points to the need for Central Americans to begin producing other Souths within the nuanced and tense makings of Latino/a, Latin–Americanness, and U.S.-situated Americanness.

Somatic and Geographic Guatepeorianness

This section begins by working through the vast uses of an idiom that texture and lend credibility to my premise of Guatepeorianness as a dismal reflection of Central America. The strange saga of the vernacular phrase “de Guatemala a Guatepeor” drives one to try to make meaning of it, as it cannot be uncoupled from the monological assumptions about Central America’s geography and cultural identity. Its origins are indeterminate, but as Arthur Aristides Natella Jr. puts forward in *Latin American Popular Culture*, the “colorful expression” forms part of the region’s “traditional wisdom” (2008: 38–39). Curiously, de Guatemala a Guatepeor is one of 986 entries that compose “the wisdom of the folk” catalogued in *A Dictionary of Mexican American Proverbs* (Glazer, 1987: xi).¹¹ It is summoned in works from the Chicano movement like the Teatro de la Esperanza’s play, *Guadalupe* (Huerta, 1989: 224), as well as in life narratives like Gloria López-Stafford’s *A Place in El Paso: A Mexican-American Childhood* (1996: 106). The saying also arises in analyses of Chicana and women of color predicaments, as surmised by Paula Moya in *Learning from Experience* (2002: 37). I treat de Guatemala a Guatepeor not as a passing remark, but as a figure of thought and code of knowledge. It is a central theme that gives birth to a system of odd Central American referentials.¹²

The euphemism’s equivalences in English range from hitting an excess of rough patches, falling into circumstances that turn from bad to worse, or going from out of the frying pan into the fire. I inject this Guatepeorian examination with the descriptions, sensory encounters, and literary evocations of the isthmus. They are employed as a necessary reiteration of recurring cultural properties not because they are mirror images of Central America but because of the peculiar discourse that stamps the region. Steven Pinker posits that “there are two likely habitats” for “where the meanings of words live.” One of them “is the world, where we find the things that a word refers to. The other is in the head where we find the people’s understanding of how a word may be used” (2007: 281). A physical world, Guatemala, walks alongside an individual’s enunciated conjuration of Guatepeor. It remains to be said that there are individuals who loathe the expression, as evinced by the Guatemalan Facebook group, “yo tambien odio k digan vamos de Guatemala a guatepeor!!!”¹³ (“I also hate that they say we’re going from Guatemala to guatepeor!!!”) Others insist that the name “Guatemala” be changed to

“Guatebella” because of the negative register of meanings in this adage (Valladares Molina, 2008). While drawing on this phraseology, I push for new Latino and Latina ideas and cultural reference points that speak to the realities and practices of Central Americans dwelling in what Oscar Hijuelos presents as the “United Stays” (2011: 3).

So let us briefly approach our first Guatepeorian panorama by leafing through Caryl Phillips’s collection of essays, *The Atlantic Sound*, which trails the voyage the author and his parents took from Guadeloupe to England when he was four months old. While traveling on a banana boat, Phillips overhears the captain’s navigational frustrations. To get to England, he must coast through one, or more, of the wretched — and in his professional life, inescapable — banal banana republics. The captain proclaims, “it’s just another banana republic” in Costa Rica and “fucking banana republic” in Guatemala (2000: 10–12).¹⁴ Under his gaze, there is a collective oneness that appears to be Central America. Yet in this figuration, the banana’s “tropicality,” paired with its signifier for the corrupt and unpromising Podunk places from which it sprouts, is left behind. But their misery continues to come up through that hackneyed maxim, reducing Guatemala and the rest of Central America to a repetitive reference of object nothingness.¹⁵

Isthmian nothingness is hardly discarded literarily. It emerges in Latino and Latina literature as a measuring stick for disaster that also represents people as conditions. Esmeralda Santiago applies this precept for the challenges faced by the Puerto Rican diaspora. Her first memoir casts light on a common conceptual perception of Central America as a grave and anguished space. An epigraph to one of her autobiographical sketches announces, “*De Guatemala a guata-peor* [. . .] *From Guatemala to guate-worse*” (1993: 133).¹⁶ Despite Santiago’s incongruous use of “guata” and “guate,” the cloying proverb is far from nebulous. It must draw on Guatemala to be able to function as a criterion for misfortunes. The parallels between Puerto Ricans and Guatemalans notwithstanding, the former have the prospect of leaving both the state of Guatemalan badness and Guatepeorianness. Puerto Ricans, after all, have not been sociohistorically constructed as Central Americans. The island has been a U.S. colony since the advent of the banana republics, and Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. Guatepeorianness for Puerto Ricans is discursively temporary, while Central Americans are doomed in Guatepeorianness. One must ask, what can Guatepeorianness ever posi-

tively contribute to Latinoness and Latinaness in its pessimistic, negative predicament?

De Guatemala a Guatepeor organizes an understanding of individuals that come from Central America. Extending the breadth of “guate-worse,” we come across an official Guatepeor producing a figurative social “territory” and “community.” Guatepeor, an index for the isthmus, is idiomatic and seemingly in stasis. Central America, as an amalgam of a repetitive banana republic, is frozen in time. If the U.S. South has been defined “as a national ‘other,’” the “central” otherness of Latin America’s other South, Central America, is evinced by its departure from U.S. Americanness, Latin Americanness, and the U.S. Latino and Latina triad (Gray, 2002: xvi).

Other scholars have reinscribed this debasing Guatepeorian state to Mexican migrants. It has been written that “for Mexicans to choose the United States, reversed the old Latin American saying, from *de Guatemala a guatepeor* (which, loosely translated, means to go from bad to worse) to *de guatepeor a Guatemala*” (J. Limón, 1998: 101). Things are so bad that Mexicans in the United States cease to be discursively Mexican. They become Guatemalan-like. Things are dreadful — mala *Guatemala* bad — but not as ruinous as they would be under Guatepeorianness, an ambivalent model more in line with the “worse-ness” of Guatemalans and Central Americans. Although Mexico becomes the metaphoric Guatemala, most significant is the afflicted state of Guatepeor. My capitalization of the word “Guatepeor” enhances a formally recognized state that symbolically supersedes Guatemala’s meanings as a nation.

Why does this saying make so much sense in Latino and Latina literary creativity and intellectual production? And what might it mean if we drew on U.S. cities from the Global North as a site of insignificance? For instance, the American heartland hosts a small city in central Illinois and a town in central Arizona named “Peoria.” People from these locales are known as “Peorians.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) elaborates that “Peoria” is “a member of a North American Indian people constituting one of the autonomous groups forming the Illinois people.” Peoria is also “the Algonquian language of the Peorias (applied both to the dialect of the Peoria band and to the Illinois language generically).” In terms of its everyday, American uses, Illinois’s Peoria “has been proverbially regarded as the typical measure of U.S. cultural and intellectual standards at least since Ambrose Bierce (c. 1890).” Peoria has also

functioned as “the butt of baseball player jokes (c. 1920–40, when it was part of the St. Louis Cardinals farm system) and popularized in the catchphrase ‘It’ll play in Peoria’ (often negative), meaning ‘the average American will approve,’ which was popular in the Nixon White House (1969–74) but seems to suggest a vaudeville origin.” On the whole, Peoria is the “embodiment of U.S. small city values and standards [which] include Dubuque, Iowa; Hoboken and Hackensack, N.J.; Oakland (Gertrude Stein: ‘When you get there, there isn’t any there there’), and Burbank, Calif., and the entire state of North Dakota” (Dictionary.com, n.d.). The “Guate” in Guatemala calls attention to quaint Central America and the “Peoria” of Guatepeorianness takes us to a U.S. rhetoric of geographic smallness and quaintness. Although Peoria is in the hegemonic Global North, it is still the “worst” that the U.S. terrain has to offer vis-à-vis its American ordinariness. The *OED* concisely summarizes Peoria as “any place (in the United States) inhabited by people with plain, down-to-earth, conventional tastes and attitudes.” It is unavoidable to speculate, one might add, what a U.S. Central American in Peoria might be called, a Guatepeorian-Peorian?

Guatemala and Guatepeor share an operating system of meaning emphasizing unfavorable states for anyone who may or may not be Guatemalan. These *de Guatemala a Guatepeor* entailments may be attempts to articulate a common language that aims to capture the tensions of this “American” moment, while also speaking to a referential mode of Latino and Latina hardship, daily indignities, and disadvantage. But the manner in which Central Americanness is being brought up and written dictates a reevaluation. Given the rhetorical value of Guatepeor — one in which many Latinos and Latinas seem to have symbolically passed through — has this site-as-condition changed the subjectivation of a given Latino or Latina? Guatepeorianness inadvertently creates hierarchies that naturalize the presumed inevitable state of Central American calamitousness. *Mala* (bad) and *peor* (worse) may change in disagreeable, unsatisfactory, or injurious conditions. But the “Guate” prefix faithfully clings to the mapping of Guatemalan geopolitics. The inactive Central American Guate is, if another colloquial phrase may be permitted, the exclusive gift that keeps on giving to Guatemalans and, by extension, Central Americans: the unquestionable typification of Guatepeorianness.

What does Guatepeorianness look like? And what does the language of Guatepeorian read like? Observe these limners of dark brown Central

American figures and their emergence in the U.S. landscape. Dianne Walta Hart discloses that the physical traits of the Nicaraguan woman in her testimonial, *Undocumented in L.A.*, accentuate the “smallness of her hands and features. She is less than five feet tall with frizzy brown hair that frames her light brown face and a ruddy complexion” (1997: xxii). The nationality and unpleasant appearance of Hart’s informant, whom she names Marta, hallmark a mismatched creature. Her light brown face is disproportionate to the reddish complexion. To picture Marta’s endemic oddness is to see red: indigenous red skin or ideological red. Her superimposed redness paints a radical leftist in politics, unruly behavior, and the color of blood. Marta is an undesirable citizen from Guatepeor. Yet the undocumented Marta participates in the American everyday.

Marta resembles the “it-ness” of an animal or object introduced by Danzy Senna in *Symptomatic*. This fictional enterprise pens “Menchu” as a doppelgänger for Maya author and human rights activist, Rigoberta Menchú, who received the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize and Príncipe de Asturias de Cooperación Internacional award in 1998. But the region’s accomplishments are sullied, diminutivized to their intrinsic feral Guatepeorian nature. Menchu — under this inscription, Menchú’s last name lacks a diacritical mark on the “u” — can be extracted as a “poodle-monkey,” a living thing “who doesn’t like labels” (Senna, 2004: 102). *Symptomatic*’s narrator frugally reveals the reason for the canine-primate denotation: “[I]t was named after the Guatemalan peasant and memoirist Rigoberta Menchu” (118). Marta’s and Menchu’s status of belonging is Guatepeorian or, even more incurable, Guatepeorianness: a region-specific, anthropoid diminutive — or demonym — for being almost lovable and fully pitiable. As a social condition, helpless Guatepeorianness embodies any Central American nation. Borrowing from Héctor Tobar, the Cold War Guatepeorian still image depicts “an innocent, provincial, friendly kind of face, the face of someone you feel sorry for because you know they’re Guatemalan and thus gullible and luckless by definition, the whole host of things Guatemalans are famous for. *Una cara que da lástima*” (1998: 78).

Guatepeorianness divulges exaggerated webs of difference, as Patricia Engel demonstrates.¹⁷ Her debut novel, *Vida*, describes a cornucopia of Latin American maids employed by a Colombian American family in New Jersey. But it is the recently arrived Guatemalan woman, Deisy — possessing “a mouth full of gold” and whose surprising dietary habits include the

unsavory consumption of turtle eggs—that stands outside U.S. suburbia and acceptable Latino and Latina social relations (2010: 90). It goes without saying that my point is not to prove false or erroneous the possibility that a Central American may have gold teeth or unabashedly enjoy the frequent ingestion of turtle eggs. Rather, I seek to problematize the signifying practices and characteristics applied to “parvenus and numerically lesser immigrant Latin American populations” as they textually mingle with other U.S. Latinos and Latinas (R. Rodriguez, 2002: 109). What interests me is how Central American “difference” is managed and represented—how the unequal relations and statuses of U.S. Latinos and Latinas are “acclimated”—so that a cultural precept and politics surface at the expense of Central American otherness. It is no accident, for instance, that Deisy makes a deal with Sabina, her employers’ daughter, to stop eating the endangered turtle eggs (Engel, 2010: 91). A particular and acceptable kind of Latino and Latina mode comes forth, a type of unifying solidarity where the Guatemalan other hangs on as othered. This otheredness hints at the importance of Guatepeorianness: a conflicting ideology that still suggests their Latino and Latina dislocation. But if Guatepeorianness signals a specifically Central American form of Latin underdevelopment, it also codifies Latino and Latina proximity to a simultaneous present and up-and-coming “American” future.

The reader could arrive at a similar conclusion with Cristina García’s Salvadoran character, Marta Claros, in *A Handbook to Luck*.¹⁸ Her supposititious lifestyle proves irreconcilable with the customs of Los Angeles’s more modern citizenry. Like Deisy, Marta is literarily personified through her obsession with eggs. She has a chicken coop in her backyard, even though such practice is “against city ordinances.” She goes as far as sewing clothing for “her” eggs, leaving them on “plump pillows around the house.” The third person narrator tells us that at least Marta Claros “didn’t sleep with the chickens, the way her mother used to do. What did it matter that she’d bought them a crib and a baby blanket?” (2007: 138–39). Marta Claros’s effigy provokes parallels with the informal saying, “to lay an egg,” which is tantamount to being unsuccessful before an audience. As a Guatepeorian who lays questionable eggs, Marta Claros is an American failure within the text’s performance.

Taken at face value, this “Guatepeorization” stretches to a “Central Americanization” of U.S. urban life with agrarian qualities.¹⁹ Notice the non-

fictional comments of Carmen Rivera, a Puerto Rican widowed mother of three sons referenced by De Genova and Ramos-Zayas. Rivera is aware of “the spatialized underpinnings of the racialized distinction between Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in Chicago.” But the Windy City’s South Side, which includes some of the largest concentrations of Mexicans, is “much poorer [with] lots of vacant buildings.” Its indigence seems “like a bit of Central America in the city” (2003: 63). In this grassroots estimation from the bottom up, Puerto Ricans, as U.S. citizens, are entitled to live in an American space that does not contain traces of Central American poverty and underdevelopment. Rivera’s assessment of destitution imputes a collective Guatepeorization mindful of Mexicans as they “populate” an impoverished Guatepeorianness whose backwardness essentially belongs in Central America.

This evocation of a certain type of a Latino and Latina collectivity — dependent on a flood of calamities — can be conceived as a Guatepeorian *Latinidad* for U.S. Central Americans. A Guatepeorian *Latinidad* punctuates what established U.S. Latinoness and Latinaness are not, for Guatepeorianness is consumed by the plight of undocumented Central American migrations. The compounding of the nation-state borders Central Americans have crossed to get to the United States arouse what De Genova and Ramos-Zayas identify as an “empathetic *Latinidad*” among other U.S. Latino and Latina groups (2003: 184). Despite this compassion, the Guatepeorian plight is inconsonant with those who classify or issue the empathetic *Latinidad*. What drives this empathetic *Latinidad* and what are the objectives of its affect? A Guatepeorian presence is far from therapeutic in the U.S. landscape. Guatepeorianness functions as a contemporary Latino and Latina mode of distanciation. Central Americans appear to enact un-Latinoness and un-Latinaness, one that is relatively analogous to the ideological un-Americaness precipitated by the Cold War.²⁰ Not unlike Cuban Americans, the 1980s great migration of Central Americans also occurred against the backdrop of the ideological struggle between communism versus capitalism (cf. A. García, 1997). And yet Central Americans have followed a deviating model from Cuban Americans, who received various forms of settlement assistance as well as immigration protection and legal status. The U.S. government and the media portrayed Cuban exiles from the 1960s and 1970s as people who shared American ideals in their unequivocal opposition to communism. By contrast, Central Americans were largely regarded as economic rather than political migrants.

This distinction turned them into undeserving of American protection and assistance within the United States.

Additional Latino and Latina groups like Dominicans could fall under this Cold War lens as well. Junot Díaz has revisited in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* other forms of corresponding un-Americanness that modify Guatepeorianness by not merely outlining irreversible Guatemalan-like *mala* adversity. He invokes an embryonic process of “becoming” in the Global North: northern New Jersey. A Central American “ethnoracial marginalia” surfaces when the Dominican American protagonist encounters a Salvadoran “who was burned all over his face [. . .] and looked like the Phantom of the Opera” and an undocumented, pregnant Guatemalan hitchhiker (2007: 171, 198). These peripheral figures represent a gathering of inhabitants who have been affected by civil unrest in the Western Hemisphere, catastrophic moments that Díaz references as *fukú*. Described as “the Curse and the Doom of the New World” and “the Great American Doom,” *fukú* applies to the Global South’s externally “democratized” nations and the ensuing migrations to the United States from foreign intervention (4–5). These disfigured Cold War Americans — or, Americans of *fukú* descent — call attention to a different linguistic symbology of Latinoness and Latinaness that needs to be staged. Take note of how *fukú* distinctively features Cold War ideology and distress without bringing up the grimness of Guatepeor.

The retelling of this American way of life is an important point of U.S. Latino American and Central American–American intertwinement. It allows us to begin theorizing how recent Latino and Latina migrants are created and how they are constructed in literary unravelings of political events orienting readers toward an understanding of American social reality.²¹ How to think about Latino and Latina conceptions of “self” as well as literary and theoretical endeavors struggling with hierarchically different southern signifiers and living beings?²² In 1992 — the year of the quincentenary in the Americas and the year that also marked El Salvador’s Peace Accords — the anthology *Iguana Dreams* noted that U.S. Latino and Latina literature “has many points of divergence.”²³ The editors found that despite the diversity of Latino and Latina experiences, a central theme in these approaches is “the need for cultural survival,” one that adverts to American assimilation and how “Latinos camouflage and adapt to new environments without losing their identity.” The continuation of Latino and Latina existence sheds light on what this

volume's compilers regarded as a collective preoccupation: "How much of our culture should we be willing to lose or suppress in order to participate in mainstream society" (Poey and Suarez, 1992: xvii–xviii)?

This canvass needs some modification. How are nonnormative ("new") Latino and Latina subjectivities incorporated in mainstream society and in the imperturbable deployment of the Latino and Latina triad? How do Latino and Latina groups — in the broad sense of these terms — survive? As audiences grasp Latino and Latina diversity through a "brown" homogeneity, Latino and Latina novelists become "cultural interpreter[s]" for white audiences (Augenbraum and Stavans, 1993: xvi). Latino and Latina literary approaches to this population's subgroups lead us to contemplate what is at stake when "ethnic insiders" access communities with a makeup similar to their own.²⁴ Are there any lettered implications to these speculative uses of Central Americans, possibly pointing at an oral, dark brown Indian population whose material basis as Guatepeorians needs to be penned by a Latino and Latina *American* literary culture?²⁵ I push more questions to the forefront of Latino and Latina literary identities: Can Central Americans be read — and move through Latino and Latina creative thought — without the particular sets of Guatepeorian constraints? How does a "Latino" or "Latina" individual become cognitively visible within Latinoness and Latinaness? We must be heedful to the subjects and themes that forge the directions Latino/a studies assumes now and in the future, supposing that such a category and paradigm continue.

Both Latino/a and Central American are sites under construction. Yet we must invariably question how we are carving up and consolidating a reassuringly comprehensive Latino being, one who constitutes an American personhood by holding up a dark mirror of erupting Central American differences. Central American imperceptibility passes through the circuits and range of vision of Latinoness and Latinaness. These crossings, however, are not yet viable in a Latino/a studies present. Achille Mbembe's observations on African power and subjectivity, as described in *On the Postcolony*, come to mind. "In this book," he writes, "the *subject* emerging, acting effectively, withdrawing, or being removed in the act and context of *displacement* refers to two things: first, to the forms of 'living in the concrete world,' then to the subjective forms that make possible any validation of its contents — that objectify it" (2001: 17). African ways of living, processes of emergence and withdrawal, in

line with validation/invalidation and objectification, resonate with this union of Guatepeorian iconographies that draw up a picture of “our” present Latino and Latina moment. But Central American–Americanness stands before us in this contemporary Latino and Latina period too. It is a nascent diagram of incompatible Latino and Latina, U.S., and Latin–American discursive visibilities. And yet Central American–Americanness takes us to other visible facts, perspectives, and the shifting character of Latinoness, Latinaness, and Americanness in the Global South.

Getting an American–American Life

Néstor García Canclini heralded a global task in 2002: to locate Latin Americans in the world as these individuals look for a place in this disparate century. He spoke of Latin America’s incompleteness induced by the region’s mass migrations and transnational flows. “Latin America,” García Canclini reported, “is not complete in Latin America. [. . .] Latin Americanness has come loose, overflowing its territory, drifting toward dispersed routes” (2002: 19–20).²⁶ His search for a Latin America without Latin America relates to the absence of what has become regionalized bodies lacking specific national problems in the Global North. But Latin America’s current unfinished circumstances also signify the dispersal and spurring of Latin America–as–knowledge, or in García Canclini’s categorical shorthand, “lo latinoamericano.”

Looking for a place in this century, then, entails articulating a sense of self and place at this relatively emptied, de–Latin Americanized juncture. Still, García Canclini’s look of inquiry conveys a strict vehicle for finding and expressing a Latin American epistemological space. It presupposes that the continental idea of America comprehensively moves along and segues with the homogenized Latin migrant. Latin Americanness becomes known upon crossing paths with the Global North. García Canclini’s reading of Latin Americanness ostensibly relocates to places like the United States. But this hemispherist scope does not suggest a reciprocal way of looking at Latin Americans from U.S. Latino and Latina perspectives. To cite one working illustration, García Canclini does not direct attention to contemporary sociocultural and political processes that predate his dissemination of Latin unity as theoretical knowledge. As we have appraised, this epistemic approach can also be found in U.S. *Latinidad*, despite its discursive weak-

nesses and drawbacks. And yet Latino, Latina, and Latin-American mobility serves as a springboard for thinking about such matters as, From where is the next generation of Latinidad or Latin Americanness being engendered? If Latin America is being de-Latinized, are Latino and Latina migrants from the Global North, who return to the region for different reasons and circumstances, “re-Latinizing” it? Or, I should say, could these Latino and Latina bodies in action, new locals and translocals with returning gazes, be enabling a new rehearsal of “Latin-America”?

Far from instituting an inimical opposition of *lo latinoamericano* versus U.S. Latinidad (*lo latino estadounidense*), and at great distance from reproducing the common pool of resources bearing Latino- or Latin American-specific frames of reference alone, I examine the elided migratory margins within the constituents of a hemispherist “community” North and South. I am interested in how the Central American diaspora — and its attempts to produce theories and methodologies — fall under what Raewyn Connell (2007) calls “Southern Theory,” as presented in this book’s first chapter. Guatemalan novelist and critic Arturo Arias has initiated a wide-ranging discussion by pointing to the double deracination of Central Americans across the North/South divide in the Americas. His regional and repetitive unit, “Central American–American,” conveys an identity-in-the-making that is fomented by displacement and that has yet to arrive in the U.S. Latino and Latina world as well as in Latin-America. This not-so-subtle line of Central American difference — or nontransferable southern likelihood — is disproportionately noticeable: it is south of the U.S. North and South, Mexico, and such normative framings as “Latin America and the Caribbean.” Central American–American is the embodiment of a bordered space in a given Global North and a Global South that exempts such geographies.

In view of the bidirectional “Latin” omission in Central America as well as its itinerant designation, Central American–American, I take a conjectural approach by confronting fundamental questions. As I enumerate focal points, my intention is not to pile up question upon question on the subject. I engage with what Edith Grossman describes as “the technique of query-as-response — a traditional, perhaps time-honored method of indicating the almost impenetrable difficulty of the subject” (2010: 5–6). So doing, my open-ended questions as methodology concentrate on how to theorize Latinness, Latinness, and Americanness through optics exceeding the ideological foun-

dations of U.S. Americanness, South Americanness/Latin Americanness, and the Hispanic/Latino triad. These concerns reveal the impasse found in the fields that contain and promulgate the meaning of Latin and America: Latin American studies, Latino/a studies, and American studies. The interrogative voice utilized here interpretatively aims to employ interdisciplinarity to get somewhere, that is, to the representation of the “no-places” and the “no-bodies” not yet known in discursive sites. It presents us with what artist Kara Walker might call a “continuity of conflict” in a conceptual approach that reinvestigates and reopens what we already think we know, Latinos and Latinas as well as Americanness in the United States (quoted in Halbreich, 2007: 2).

Through the rubric of the Global South and an inspection of how subject formation operates and is produced in multiple Souths, I work through the sources and foundations of knowledge for individuals who have not been fully integrated as Latin American or U.S. Latino and Latina. In the context of a denationalized Central America and subjects from the Global South, we might look into the following questions: How are “origins” and hemispheric belonging redirected when the “Latinness” and “Americanness” of Latinos and Latinas are dislodged and transported into such epistemologies and alterations as Central American–American? What does Global South studies have to offer that border studies, comparative ethnic studies, Latin American studies, and trans-American studies do not? Finally, what comparativist approaches open up due to the hyphenated American–American excess undercurrent in Central American–American, and what does it mean to live with a reiterative Americanness in the Global South?

Unraveling this American twinship and its incapacity to fully dwell in the normative Americas (North America/South America) activates a different future of Americanness that imparts un-Americanness across the Americas. This un-Americanness challenges previous lines of thought on hemisphericism and U.S.-centrism. It suspends the elsewhere-ness of unsettled paradigms that turn “south to the future” (Hobson, 2002). Such intellectual pursuits force one to ask if there is a critical South for Central American–Americanness and if it holds a welcoming promise. “As an open-ended and inclusive category,” Matthew Sparke contends, the Global South is not “a fixed territory or geo-strategic bloc, but rather a congeries of human geographies that are place-specific and space-making in the face of devastating and far from flatten-

ing resources" (2007: 123). Despite the persistence of Americanness, Central American–Americanness is not fixed. Its inward-turned southwardness demands fluctuations in assorted worlds lacking exactitude and rearranging regional and national ways of being, thinking, and living. The Global South affords Central American–Americanness an entryway into this analytic milestone with ever-expanding conversations and political memberships taking on America in a myriad of articulatory forms. In its struggles for getting its own American life, an insistent American–Americanness teases out the Latin American, U.S. *Latinidad*, and American axis.

I weave a theoretical discussion on the uncertainties conveyed in — and the ambivalent exchange between — Latino/a and Central American–American. These terms exhibit new linguistic fluencies in Latino/a studies and its subgroups. The abridged, identificatory language of "Latino/a studies" indicates that there are subjects standing out of place, alienated from the representative but too precarious ethnoracial signifier Latino and Latina. The track I take brings out what is glossed over in the day-by-day practice of Latino/a studies: from its naming and what is customarily read as its only discursive hegemony (*viz.* the ethnoracial Latino/a triad) to the function of emergent Latino and Latina lives. The situatedness and *modi operandi* of Latino/a studies are changing and so is the shifting location (and the naming of an) individual from the Global South. The constitutive elements of Central American–American stage how "multitasking" selfhoods navigate and exceed the current operating connotations of Latino and Latina.

Central American–Americanness becomes an important *raison d'être* into Latino/a studies, altering the field's directions in the Global South. Central American–American is contiguous to the theories framing the metatext of *Latinidad*. It is in relation to — and outside the articulatory foundations of — *Latinidad*, after all, that Central American–Americanness emanates. While Central American–American suggests Latino and Latina as an unattainable state, it also interrogates the presumed stability of Latinoness and Latinaness. Arias's optic allows for "a theoretical space for those dispersed faces of 'otherness' that do not fit within the validated limits of Latin Americanidad or the recognized marginality of the United States" (2003: 170). He acknowledges that Central American–American is "an awkward linguistic oddity, in relation to other U.S. Latino groups" and to other U.S. ethnicities, since Central American–American is a pioneering configuration in the twenty-first

century. As of this writing, there are no other ethnoracial models in ethnic studies, American studies, Latin American studies, and Latino/a studies that accentuate reiterative modes of American-American excess to underscore a triumvirate U.S. (American), regional (Central and Latin American), and pan-ethnic (U.S. Latino and Latina) disenfranchisement. Certainly the “double alienness” that Arias configures for transnational Central American gangs applies here (2007: 182).²⁷ Central American–American is so strange—and estranged—that its insistent claims of American–Americanness seem unbelievable. The credibility adjoined to this American–American incredibility references the sundry kinds of borders Central Americans have crossed to arrive and live in the United States. Central American–Americanness marks the concurrent flows of transnational migration and deportations writing and dividing—in effect, hyphenating and compounding—U.S. American alienation in more than one American setting. Reorienting the boundaries of U.S. Americanness, Latin Americanness, and U.S. Latinoness and Latinaness, Central American–Americanness adjusts to interactive American–Americanness. “As a compression of time and space,” this American variant imparts “the *moving* ground between the Americas” and within them (Zilberg, 2007: 493).

Central American–American—with its recurrent but disconnected American twinship—impels subjects to put life into words outside that embodied oddity of what Rubén Darío called, in a *modernista* context, a literary grouping of “los raros” (2005: 400–415).²⁸ Central Americans as Latino and Latina misfits are not so peculiar when one sorts out the unusual spaces from which the manifold meanings of Central America begin. Some Central American nationalities like Salvadoran fluctuate as less than meticulous references when they turn to such distortions as San Salvadorian or Salvadorian/Salvadorean (with or without the capitalized article “El”). This idiosyncrasy is not unique when evoking a nationality that is unknown or about to be known, like “Porta Ricans” at the turn of the twentieth century and the recent axiomatic summoning of “Columbians” and “Dominican Republicans.” Stultifying representations of Central Americans prove as incisive as Central American absence. Between states of becoming and translating into something else, like Guatepeorian, El Salvadorian, or inhabiting an Americanness so undexterous it might as well be called “Central Americanian,” Central American–American proposes Latino and Latina as a comparative

possibility. Even though there is vagueness to what comprises Latino and Latina subjects, these labels do not have a nebulous reference, academically speaking, in connection to such groups as Chicano and Chicana, Cuban American, and Puerto Rican. Central American–American consequently advances as “an anadiplosis that sounds more like a redundancy, a radically disfigured projection of what ‘Latin Americanness’ has been assumed to be” (Arias, 2003: 171).

The oddity is the redundancy in the deployment of Central American–American, a perplexing riddle in North America, since it deviates from former president Reagan’s interventionist stance that “Central America is America.”²⁹ Central America becomes Central America–America, that which has not been known or geohistorically occupied. Arias’s exegesis is worth consulting. The term is a “dissonance” operating as

a “performative contradiction” that opens up the possibility for recognition of this as-yet-unnamed segment of the U.S. population. [T]he clumsiness of the sound itself, “Central American–American,” underlines the fact that it is an identity which is not one, since it cannot be designated univocally as “Latino” or as “Latin American,” but is outside those two signifiers from the very start. It is not quite life on the hyphen as [Gustavo] Pérez Firmat (1994) put it, but more like life off the hyphen, as Juan Flores (2001) asserted in a different sense. Not off the hyphen because these people already inhabit a world that is a montage of cultures, a hybridity so advanced that it has already conformed to a new subjectivity. Rather, they are off the hyphen because they are on the murky margins, not even on the Anglo, North American or South American center: it is life on the margins of those hyphenated others (Cuban-Americans, Mexican-Americans). It is a population that has not earned the hyphen to mark its recognition, its level of assimilation and integration, within the multicultural landscape of the United States. (2003: 171)

Latino or Latina is composed of an unseen, internal hyphenation status. The representational hyphen extends only to groups that have been “seen,” historically, “here.” Arias’s repetition corresponds to marginal versions of America in relation to normative America and the Americas “of color” that are far from murky. Central American–American is an articulation that can transpire “anywhere” due to its U.S. Latino, Latina, and Latin-American ungroundedness. It is regenerated through displacement, and not necessarily

from one's compatibility—or incompatibility—with the United States or a Central American nation.

Central American–Americanness is precedently marked, without explicitly being designated as such, by José Luis Falconi and José Antonio Mazzotti's "Other Latino" status.³⁰ It denotes "new Latin American migrants" outside the scope of the traditionally defined Latino groups: Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans. The descriptive term includes "three of the most significant sectors within the recent wave of other Latin American migration: Central Americans, Andeans, and Brazilians" (2007: 1–4). Despite the categorical intervention, the necessity behind this conjectural inauguration becomes slippery. Falconi and Mazzotti note that their employment of Latino is informed by an earlier construction of this umbrella label, where "the Latino Population of the United States is a highly heterogeneous population that defies easy generalization. . . . We have opted for the broadest, most inclusive, and most generous definition: that segment of the U.S. population that traces its descent to the Spanish speaking, Caribbean, and Latin American worlds." But if Latino ultimately encompasses "all those of Spanish and Latin American origin living within the United States, including peoples of Mexican descent born in the United States and all Spanish and Latin American immigrants and their descendants," why replace the spacious category with an otherizing, alternate group of "marginal" peoples who are presently involved in one aspect or another with Latino and Latina life (6)?

Falconi and Mazzotti's anthology is an invaluable contribution to Latino/a studies. But the Other Latino designation reads rather linearly and in an absolute form. It lacks any kinds of cultural passages and dialogues with "dominant" Latino and Latina groups. Falconi and Mazzotti remark that "there is no guarantee that all the different communities of people of Spanish and Latin American descent that live in this country will some day share a new, singular, hybrid Latino identity, nor that many would desire such an outcome" (2007: 6). But there is no assurance that Other Latinos desire such a qualifier either. Latino and Latina, as exercised by Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans, have been a foundation for the ever-unfolding Latino and Latina project, since not one of these groups alone has exclusively represented Latinoness and Latinaness. They have concretized, instead, the decisive meanings and local geographies of Cuban Americanness (e.g., Miami and Union City, New Jersey), Puerto Ricanness and Nuyoricaness (e.g., New

York, Chicago, and Philadelphia), and Mexican Americanness/Chicanoness (e.g., the U.S. Southwest).

Although I list Other Latino as a rubric for “secondary” U.S. Central American migrations, it is productive to labor through the meanings of Latino and Latina within the makings and historical demographics of what the editors refer to as “the most established groups in the United States” (Falconi and Mazzotti, 2007: 1). Falconi and Mazzotti acknowledge Latino and Latina heterogeneity. I am cautious, however, about the ways in which Central and South Americans are constellated as a subcategory of otherness to challenge the Latino and Latina discursive space. Central and South American are not symmetrical in their U.S. sociopolitical, cultural, and historical visibility as well as Latin American standing. I by no means apply a “hierarchical invisibility.” I interrogate the reasons Latinoness and Latinaness are further otherized and quantified with another umbrella term highlighting distinctiveness from an antecedently “subalternized” category. Latino and Latina constituents need to be reworked not so much by adding more nationalities and regions as aggregate otherizations. Latino, as a category constantly in flux, is a project with no established origins. Before the “established” groups of Mexican-American/Chicano/a, Puerto Rican, and Cuban American enter the dominant U.S. space as “Latino” and “Latina,” these groups “exist” through their own ethnoracial particularities and U.S. histories. Latino and Latina come to “be” when the category is articulated in spheres that exceed their nationalist specificity, especially when one’s ethnicity or nationality is used as a generic beginning for comparative Latino and Latina possibilities. One specific ethnoracial group alone does not make it “Latino,” though its “being” resonates or emulates “Latinness.”

Other Latinos overlook the nuances inherent in articulations of *Latinidad*. *Latinidad* ought not necessarily be marked through Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Cuban American. Latinoness and Latinaness are an articulation that necessitates further explanations that capture how one enters this category and why. Is one “naturally” a Latino or Latina, or is it a process of “becoming” through globalized southern and northern locations? Other Latinos, like current U.S. Latinos and Latinas, are imagined as Central and South American aggregates to brown. It is a brownness that is not revamped and that does not cross any ethnoracial borders that attend to divergent forms of the national. How is an Other (U.S.) Latino, vis-à-vis un-Latinoness

and un-Americanness, produced? An undisputable dark brown indigeneness could very well be its definitive Central American marker. But more than another form of Latineness and Latinaness, another type of Central Americanness is emphasized, another neglected un-Latino/Latino simultaneity whose “presencing” has yet to be localized. And, to be sure, that has yet to be fully mobilized in our critical practices and their political implications.

Central American–American anticipates multidirectional processes of Latinities. Such Latinities are joined by multiple semiotics that do not necessarily warrant a hyphen. The three tags of the mutable “Peru Anas,” as shown in the photographs — visualized biographical moments in a trio of takes — illuminate this point of becoming a denationalized something else. These Peru Anas splinter and have yet to have categorical language within Latinidad, the United States, and Latin-American spaces. They engulf themselves in the rich parenthetical fringes that are passing by and uncontainable in this articulated U.S. Latino and Latina moment.

The anecdotal Peru Anas, scattered throughout New York City’s East Village, are — and are not — from Peru in referential terms. The blank between the first name, Peru, and the last name, Ana (the “same” applies for the “other” Peru Ana that is Ana Peru) is intentional. Its incursion points to versatile but reflecting “Peruvian” configurations that are paradoxically denationalized and renationalized. Peru Ana’s and Ana Peru’s uncommissioned visual gives rise to our nimble circumstance in the Global South. In their destinationless state, Peru Ana’s and Ana Peru’s unauthorized public art and unsolicited selfhoods loop and litter the city, challenging notions of vandalism and the public good. Yet they equip us with a determined destination: a public space marking a scrawled being in the populous first world metropole.³¹ Ostensibly legible with its capitalized letters, the individualized doubleness of Peru Ana and Ana Peru goes beyond penmanship. Peru Anacum–Ana Peru is part of the city’s text. The tags are an extension of renamed skyscrapers and street corners with infinite names whose stories are being fleetingly penciled in. The urban patina of Latino and Latina is tarnished with other spontaneous and unmediated compounds. These preliminary sketches turn unsettled “Peruvianness” upside down, setting forth a southern assemblage with motley openings and origins.

Paula Moya has asked a central question that assists and gives important form to this study. “Will there come a point,” she inquires, “where we will



Peru Ana/Ana Peru tags in New York City's East Village. Photos by Frank Augustine. Used by permission of the photographer.

see ourselves primarily as 'Latina,' and secondarily if at all, as 'Chicana,' or 'Puerto Rican,' or 'Cubana?'" (2003: 249). In the general context of one of the most commonly studied ethnoracial groups in Latino/a studies, Moya's solicitude makes sense. I wonder, however, on the congruous inclusion, with a handful of literary exceptions, of Cuban Americans to the study of Latino and Latina lives, identifications, and experiences. Unlike Chicano/a studies

and Puerto Rican studies, for example, there is no program or department for Cuban American studies.³² Another fitting question might be, how does Cuban American exclusion take us to unstable, but recalibrated, directions in the evolving project of Latino/a studies and its challenges? And yet as someone who grew up in the United States, away from my country of birth (El Salvador), and learned to theorize my sense of being and belonging in the U.S. social sphere through Chicaneness, my response to Moya's query is, yes.³³ In my U.S. Latina formulation, Salvadoranness, as expressed and theorized in "distant" El Salvador, is an abstraction, as is the "reserved" state of Latinoness and Latinaness. But these unfolding Latinoness and Latinaness have more merit and relevance for me, since this is the space in which I was cast as an ethnoracial other and framed in a different national voice. Latinaness is, conflictingly, where I "unbelong" and where I attempt to find ways of belonging. Central American–Americanness bears importance because it questions these comparable yet incompatible—"irreconcilable," as Du Bois would put it—ways that as, Peru Ana and Ana Peru show, multiply in a Global North. Central American–American pronounces the liminalities that dominant accounts of Latinoness and Latinaness must extricate to theoretically build on Latino and Latina fragmentation.³⁴

In the spirit of exercising a dynamic existence, we can cobble through these preoccupations: How to treat and reassemble Latino/a studies in light of the multitudinous subjects and geographies that impart such a project? What generates Latino culture? What *moves* it? Lastly, what might a Latino map look like through the global presencing of voluminous Latino and Latina communities? Although I bring up Central Americanness, I am aware that there are oversights within the isthmus and that much like U.S. Latinoness and Latinaness, its imaginaries and discourse also resonate with "brownness." I propose, however, that Central American–American attends to Central Americanness as a site of neglected multiple subjectivities and geographies that move and alter. In this regard, the standing of problematic blackness and indigenouness in Central America can be adjoined to Central American–American identities-in-the-making. Many Mayas in the 2000 U.S. Census were, in all likelihood, counted as "Hispanics." They were grouped, as Marilyn Moors conjectures, "with other Guatemalan, Mexican, and Central and South American migrants" (2000: 228). Curiously, Moors's nationalities and regions enter a kind of non-Maya Latin American formation in an equal-

izing manner. One might ask, To what extent does the “Hispanization” of Mayas categorically provide a governmental symbol that embarks on a process of indigenizing the presumed whiteness of the Hispanic category? Does the seeming uncrossability of Maya “Central Americanness” cross over the realm of Central American–Americanness?

A look at the diasporic locations of both Central American indigeness and blackness would open new sources in—as well as illustrate the limits of—the current Latino and Latina imagination. Sarah England reminds us that Garifunas, also known as “Black Caribs” in the coasts of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, have been more affiliated to the Caribbean than to Central America’s interior (2006: 1–2). England finds that Garifuna men began a U.S. process of migration in the 1940s. They worked as merchant marines, whereas Garifuna women, whose migration can be traced to the 1960s, were employed as nannies and home attendants. Yet Garifunas are “present but invisible”; they have a “degree of invisibility” that England dubs “racial camouflaging” in African American and Latino encounters (2009–10: 33).

Given their “propensity to live in African-American neighborhoods,” Garifunas “are camouflaged to the general population, including other Latinos” (England, 2009–10: 35). This “art of racial camouflaging,” as England sees it, allows Garifunas to “remain under the radar of ethnic/racial stereotyping” (46). England spells out, for instance, Garifuna strategies when dealing with the police. “In this context,” she elucidates, “they know that most police will racialize them as African-Americans until they hear them speak and therefore they will be subject to the same racist treatment. Thus in relations with police it is better to be Latino. But on the other hand they also know that to be racialized as Latino has its risks as well, namely being the target of crime and being seen as immigrants, most likely undocumented. In this context the best strategy is to speak Garifuna, which sounds to most people like an African language (even though it is actually Island Carib)” (47). Garifunas are at the interstices of such categories as Central American, Latino and Latina, and African American. Will the presumed African Americanness of these Central American groups be localized within the theoretical directions and dimensions that mark Central American–Americanness: unnameability, invisibility, awkwardness, and off-the-hyphen status? Can the discursive dark brownness of Central Americans in Latino/a studies be analytically joined

with the discursive blackening of “other” Central Americans in the isthmus? The semiotic chain of belonging proves abundantly ridden with discrepant elements and formulas: black and indigenous Central Americanness is to Central America what Central American is — as a site with simply too much Guatepeorianness — to U.S. Latinoness, Latinaness, and Latin-Americanness.

Yet as a performed displacement, Central American–American imparts the outcome of invisibility. It calls for Central Americans to begin producing equitable terrains within the nuanced and tense makings of the Latino, Latina, Latin American, and U.S. American triangulation. The critical challenge remains to study how Central American–American “un-hyphenated hyphenation” tags along and molds itself with Mexican-American hyphenation, as it has been mapped, mainly, in Chicana writing (cf. Viramontes, 1985; G. Limón, 1993; D. Martínez, 1994; Benítez, 1998, 2002; Castillo, 2005b).³⁵ Despite their off-the-hyphen status, Central Americans have been parenthetically integrated into the Chicano/a canon.³⁶ Through the internal incorporation of Central American–Americans within Latinoness, how are Chicano and Chicana cultural and political specificities complemented and amplified by other Latino and Latina groups? Since Central American cultural workers are not relaxing on the hyphen, as it were, how do other Latinos and Latinas localize and impart the American excess of Central American–American?

From this Central American “silence” and Central American–American emendation, we find omissions speaking to how we can expand margin-to-margin dialogues, as there are many more Guatepeorians, Peru Anas, Americ Anas, and, as Junot Díaz hails them, “*Dominicanis*” to discursively come. Just as the Global South is an undefined but active terrain that is in-the-making, so are the disorienting Central American–American subjects who are transforming an unfolding and associative version of Latinoness and Latinaness. Central American–American veers toward the fissures and gaps inherent in Latino and Latina “southern” living. It also promotes the critical reflection and ongoing mapping of Latino and Latina subjectivities ceasing to be rhetorically submerged in the oddest ways.