

# INTRODUCTION

## ***Cuir/Queer Américas: Translation, Decoloniality, and the Incommensurable***

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### ***Encuentros and Desencuentros***

We could trace the origins of this special issue in multiple ways, but we begin this introduction by recognizing two *encuentros* that took place in May 2015. One, *Queer Hemisphere / América Queer*, was a two-day conference held at the University of California, Santa Cruz and organized by Marcia Ochoa, Deborah Vargas, and Kirstie Dorr. The other was a breakfast meeting convened by María Amelia Viteri and Fernando Blanco during the Latin American Studies Association congress held in San Juan, Puerto Rico. These *encuentros*, along with earlier versions in Brazil and Ecuador, provided the impetus for the formation of the *Cuir Américas Working Group*, or, in Spanish, *Grupo de Trabajo Feminista/Queer/Cuir*. This constellation of people, in turn, has provided both the affective and the intellectual support that has made this special issue possible (cf. Viteri 2017). This publication is not the singular manifestation of a particular moment or agenda. Rather, it emerged from a long history of conversations, meetings, and reflections about the circulation of queer theory, its privileging of certain languages and bodies, its epistemological underpinnings, and yet the embodied encounters through which *lo cuir* has been at once an emancipatory promise and a method of subjugation for the peoples of Abya Yala / Latin America.

We could also trace a genealogy of queer theory's circulation in Latin America. But such an exercise would not only replicate the very epistemological framing that we seek to question here; it would also lend credence to the idea that

there is a singular genealogy that gives origin to *lo cuir*. This is not a search for origins. It is instead a staging of tensions, resonances, and contradictions. Doing so resists the tendency to ascribe primacy (a hierarchical understanding) to a range of optics, embodiments, and desires that have always been ongoing; processional and multiply diasporic rather than singularly delivered through the epistemological routes of colonial modernity. To question these routes rather than focus on queer theory's roots is, in our estimation, a more challenging but ultimately more ethical way of approaching the vibrations of queer theories across geopolitical locations. If there is one thing we have learned from decolonial praxis, in particular as enacted by Indigenous, Afrodiasporic, and other communities eccentric to the various *falol*/logocentric projects of modernity, it is that knowledge is not monolithic. More than a Hegelian dialectic, knowledge engages complementarities rather than the hierarchical opposites of man/woman, white/Black, hetero/homo, North/South that were (and continue to be) the basis of the modern colonial paradigm.

It should come as no surprise, then, that our *encuentros* were also fraught with challenging moments, impasses, and fractures. The *encuentro* is not a utopia. Disagreements (*desencuentros*) emerged, at times along the lines ascribed to identity labels and at times owing to linguistic or professional power imbalances. Categories such as US Latinx people, mestizo Latin Americans, Afrodescendant and Indigenous people were and continue to be difficult to imagine outside the depoliticized framework of the cultural mosaic. Likewise, faggots, *tortilleras* (dykes), bisexuals, or the not quite assimilable to any sex/gender category can see the political utility of *lo cuir* in different ways. And yet these tensions have fostered growth and learning in the process of editing this special issue. Each of us is entangled in colonial legacies and power imbalances. As such, we do not assume that, simply by interrogating the unequal conditions presiding over theory making and knowledge production, we will change the structures that generate these imbalances.

If queerness were already decolonial, then there would be no need for this special issue. And yet we feel the persistent desire to question the relationship between queerness and coloniality. So we continue to challenge the systemic inequality of knowledge production. Ingrained colonial relations also facilitate the circulation and referencing of authors from the global North over other forms of knowledge production. We reject the notion of the South as deficient or always developing and shaping itself in the image of the North. But these imbalances go beyond a facile North-South binary. They are found between *Nortes* and between *Sures*. Here we wish to underscore that there is not simply one global North or one global South. Rather, there are multiple forms of understanding how knowledge, bodies, and desires flow across borders (or are detained en route). We see this

special issue as one of multiple possible interventions to alter the conditions of knowledge production by articulating a network of sites where scholars, activists, and artists interact rhizomatically. In our planning, we have consistently returned to the image of a constellation or web, one that engages geocalities as mutually interconnected but that still recognizes the resources of knowledge production in the North that continue to situate itself as the invisible norm.

Thus, this special issue is not circumscribed to the United States and *GLQ* but also extends to Brazil with the journal *Periódicus* and to Argentina with *El lugar sin límites*. In total, this dossier includes eleven articles, a roundtable discussion, and two poems. The articles are spread across all three venues, respectively, while the roundtable and poems appear in all three publications. This means that the structure of this dossier is itself hemispheric and rhizomatic. The project aims to enact, rather than simply call for, a decolonial approach to lo cuir.

But there is still work to do. Despite having underscored the importance of engaging with frameworks and literatures from various *Sures* or US-based critical studies of queer theory (such as the Queer of Color Critique), we were surprised to see that few proposals engaged with diasporic or multiply marginalized communities. We were also surprised by the relative lack of engagement with decolonial praxis. And both Brazil and the Andean region are minimally present—at times, absent—from the three journals. These are major shortcomings. This is where the connections between structural inequalities, combined with the primary circulation of works from the Southern Cone, Mexico, and the Caribbean, collide. Or perhaps this collision reveals opportunities for future research. Critical appraisal of the relationship between queer studies and decolonial praxis remains a crucial site for investigation, as do regional, intra-, and interregional frameworks, and we hope more scholarship will take up this challenge.

### ***Contrapunteo Cuir***

One of the organizing ideas for this project is what we call the *contrapunteo cuir*. We understand this concept not as leading to transculturation as proposed in the work of Fernando Ortiz (1940) or Ángel Rama (1971) but rather as a process of encuentros and desencuentros that constitutes a forum for decolonizing knowledge. We envision the process of organizing this dossier as an *ejercicio contrapuntístico*, a contrapuntal exercise, which features multiple instances of racial and sexual/gender *disidencias* (nonconformities) across different cultural contexts. In other words, we imagine this dossier as a showcase of the myriad practices, histories, epistemologies, and phenomenologies in place in the Americas that, sometimes,

appear incommensurable. *Contrapuntear* means, in the context of this project, to place ourselves as humble cultural brokers rather than in the colonial position of expert. One of the most important lines of thought here comes from the work of women of color *escrevivências* (a term coined by Brazilian novelist and theorist Conceição Evaristo [2006] that has been rendered in English by Geri M. Augusto as *livature*) to signal that the process of decolonizing knowledge production takes place through dialogue and conflict—that is, through a *contrapunteo* in a context, like that of queer theories and practices, that is punctuated by its own *heterogeneidad contradictoria* (Cornejo Polar 1978).

The concept of *contrapunteo*, then, cannot be understood without other Latin American concepts. In addition to *escrevivências*, Antonio Cornejo Polar's *heterogeneidad contradictoria* underscores how encounters between the *ciudad letrada* (lettered city) and *cultura popular* never operate on equal footing in the Americas even though they may occur in the same time and place. And yet *oralidades* and *oraliteraturas* consistently emerge in written texts, in such contradictory ways that it is hard to speak of a singular cultural dialogue when interruption and rupture are perhaps more characteristic of Latin America as a heterogeneous region.

We face these interruptions in a material way too. The editors of this special issue are located in five different cities: Florianópolis; New York; Quito; Washington, DC; and Barcelona. What is more, as we write this introduction, the COVID-19 pandemic has cast a pall over our lives. We connect across screens rather than in person; we negotiate the fragility of our bodies and the ongoing devastation of neoliberal health regimes. Our *encuentros* often feel like *desencuentros* because of the nature of our present and the distances between us. And while the scope of the ongoing pandemic may exceed our comprehension, the sense of frustration that it has brought inexorably to the surface is not new to us.

Frustration and, as some members of the editorial team have described previously, *resentimiento* (both resentment and re-feeling; see, e.g., Falconí, Castellanos, and Viteri 2014) flesh out the discomfort of our situated knowledges and multiple understandings of and with *lo cuir*. As we are affected by the pervasive hierarchies of these imbalances ourselves, we theorize, feel, think, and write from a place of discomfort at the same time as we sketch out hope—not an innocent hopefulness but a parodic staging of queer's possibilities and shortcomings. We see our efforts in launching these publications as a modest way to contribute to decolonization of knowledge production and to nurture visions of a more just and equitable academic and artist world. This dossier invites us all to continue to critique, knowing full well that our postcolonial world has not yet met our anticolonial demands.

### **Contracartografía**

A table of contents charts a map of how to engage with the pages that follow. But maps have often been pernicious guides in the Americas, serving as colonial visions of a continent subjected to artificial partitions of territory, time, and imagination. Here too we sense the heterogeneidad contradictoria pushing back against a singular vision of how to read and how to sense time and space. There are always multiple paths, multiple territorializations at play.

As noted above, in addition to the introduction this dossier includes a forum with Duen Sacchi, Dana Galán / David Aruquipa, Marlene Wayar, and Ochy Curiel. This conversation started at the University of Michigan at an encuentro hosted by Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes and has continued across borders and over a number of months, before and during the pandemic. The roundtable lays the foundation for the praxis that we seek to highlight in this editorial project, a form of intersubjective and dialogic conversation—a contrapunteo cuir—that resonates across modes of discourse and embodiment. We have also included two poems in this collection: “la cortadura / the cut” by Raquel Salas Rivera, a meditation on gendering/loving/bodying across the unstable terrain of pronouns, home, and trans survival, appearing in both Spanish and English; and “I, Monster Mine” (“Yo monstruo mío”) by Susy Shock, which has become a trans anthem across Latin America and appears in English here for the first time.

Thus, while you may, of course, read the essays in this issue in the order in which they are set out, you may also invoke a number of alternative organizing principles, such as geographic focus, thematic interest, (inter)disciplinary orientation, language, historical period, and so on. There are different groups of texts that *make sense* together. For example, four articles transit between Argentina and the United States. Patricio Simonetto’s historical account of homosexual liberation movements in New York, Mexico City, and Buenos Aires (*Periódicus*) resonates with Germán Garrido’s theorizing of cosmopolitics in the global North and global South (*GLQ*), which in turn provides a historical scaffold for comprehending Cynthia Francica’s likewise hemispheric orientation with regard to queer and feminist publishing houses (*El lugar sin límites*), an orientation that, finally, Rocío Pichon-Rivière takes up as a phenomenological critique across bodies and borders, a transing that marks the skin as a site of intense critical reflection (*GLQ*). The skin, the flesh, is the core idea developed in Duen Sacchi’s analysis of dismemberment in the Americas (*Periódicus*), and his text, along with that of Pichon-Rivière, could inform Juan Ariel Gómez and María Laura Gutiérrez’s theorizing of (un)translatable aesthetic practices—in their case, literature and perfor-

mance (*El lugar sin límites*). Such a thematic lens is brought into focus by Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba's tripartite reading of the aesthetics of violence in Mexico's underground performance scene (*El lugar sin límites*). And yet this underground connects to the sapphic dreaming theorized by Nicola Chávez Courtright in post-war El Salvador (*GLQ*), and across the Gulf of Mexico to yet another underground, in Maile Speakman's ethnographic work on Black cuir film screenings in Havana (*Periódicus*). The Caribbean, then, expands in Sophie Large's heterogeneous reading of contemporary literature (*El lugar sin límites*), which also seeks to disrupt the border between literature and theory. This Caribbean, in turn, contracts with Christina A. León's focused reading of Puerto Rican writer Manuel Ramos Otero (*GLQ*), but it does not submit to the enclosure of a nation or a nationalist reading; rather, like dust, it floats shimmering across territories, as is our hope for all the texts gathered in this cuir constellation.

### Note

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