

## **U.S. Latino Studies in a Global Context: Social Imagination and the Production of In/Visibility.**

*Juan Poblete*

In the U.S. academy, Latino Studies is today a space where the political and the epistemological imaginations could and must face each other. The presence of a new, historically different or more complex Latino population in the U.S. along with transformations in the U.S. economic and social structure, have meant the crisis of previous frameworks for an understanding of national realities. Latino Studies could be said to be the name for the study of populations of Latin American origins residing in the U.S. at the time of globalization of the U.S. and Latin American societies and cultures. In this new configuration, while preserving the historical structural inequalities that have characterized most of its long history in the hemisphere, the U.S. and Latin America are intertwined in inextricable ways by the new flows of people, capital, goods and communications. This new configuration demands efforts from the critical and political imagination at the different national levels and may in fact announce the emergence of new global counterparts. While the actual political agency of Latinos in the U.S. context is crucial for them and may also be crucial for the future of democracy in the U.S., the ways in which these new processes are conceptualized in research and policy oriented institutions, on the one hand, and in the social imagination of Latinos in the U.S. as manifested in their cultural practices, on the other, can also play a key role in the shape of that new political landscape. In other words, the ways in which these processes are thought about can have a direct impact on their actual and potential social dynamics. Ultimately, it could also be said that through its challenges to the political and epistemological imaginations, the new global condition of Latinos is a challenge to the two separate social imaginaries which have defined these two political entities for two centuries.

In what follows then, I want to sketch out two macro developments. First, the way in which—challenged by an expanded social imagination that has fully incorporated migration and transnational cultural processes within its horizon—political and critical imaginaries are forced to expand. New reterritorializing social practices, whatever

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their origins or structural causes, demand new ways of conceptualizing those processes. Some of the limits that are quickly reached in this impasse are those of the national political and critical research imaginations. The Nation-state and the social sciences it produced are challenged to comprehend, visibilize or invisibilize, the new social processes unleashed by globalization. Secondly, there is another crucial epochal tension between imagination as a means of social control and (potential) social transformation. The dynamics of visibility and invisibility affecting newly globalized Latino populations in the U.S. often times manifest as a contradiction or tension between two forms of such in/visibility: cultural citizenship and cultural consumption, difference and recognition on the one hand, and equality both political and economic, on the other. My contention is that Latino Studies must be a place to think these tensions as a way of intervening in the uncovering of the in/visibilization of the social dynamics involved.

Arjun Appadurai has remarked on the "growing disjuncture between the globalization of knowledge and the knowledge of globalization" ("Grassroots" 4), by which he means that most research on globalization that has global circulation is produced in the West and according to the western protocols of the social sciences. Thus, in the absence of truly democratic national and international research communities, where for example, grassroots organization can participate in the design of research that studies and affects them, we lack "a global view of globalization" (Appadurai, "Grassroots" 4). This is a problem for both research and political imaginations. While social imagination has been one of the vehicles through which modern national citizens are controlled and constituted as such, it is also "the faculty through which the collective patterns of dissent and new designs for collective life emerge" (Appadurai, "Grassroots" 4). What is demanding this effort of social imaginations are the combined effects of the "runaway quality of global finance" and new forms of social life that are mobile and malleable. According to Appadurai, this new social mobility of populations previously confined and sometimes protected by the limits of the Nation-state, requires new research styles and most importantly a revision of the concept of research itself.

Latinos have been such a mobile population in the last thirty years. The contrast between this mobility and the static and territorial presuppositions of most nation-based social sciences has in turn produced particular forms of visibilization and invisibilization of Latino populations. These new dynamics are of course now added to the long history of racialized and subalternized presence of historic Latinos (Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans) in the U.S.

Some data may allow a better understanding of the roots and dimensions of the phenomena involved in the massive migration of Latinos to the U.S. According to CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America), in 1980, 34.7 % of the households in Latin America and the Caribbean lived in poverty. By 1990, that percentage had climbed to 41% and it was still 35.3% in 1999. In population terms, in 1999, 211.4 million people in the region or 43.8%, lived

in poverty (compared to 48.3% in 1990 and 40.5% in 1980). In absolute terms, the number of poor people has grown from 135.9 million in 1980 to the previously cited 211.4 million in 1999. The situation was particularly acute in some of the countries that send the most immigrants to the U.S. In 1999 in Mexico, 46.9% of the population were poor; 49.8% in El Salvador; 54.9% in Colombia; 60.5% in Guatemala; 69.9% in Nicaragua; and an astonishing 79.7% in Honduras (Addiechi 70-1). If migrants leaving Latin America numbered 21 million in the year 2000, by 2005 they were 25 million or 12% of the total 200 million migrants in the world in that year (Gainza 1).

According to Jeffery Passel and Roberto Suro's study on trends in immigration to the United States, the country received an average of 1,226,000 immigrants per year between 1992 and 2004. Of those immigrants, a third were of Mexican origin and an additional quarter were of other Latin American origins. More than a third of the general total of U.S. immigrants has been undocumented migrants, most of which come from Mexico or from other Latin American countries via Mexico. Latinos have been constantly more than half of the general migration (Passel and Suro n. pag.).

While the number of Latino immigrants has actually decreased after 9/11, when looked at in the medium historical range of the last 30 years, the numbers of the Latino population overall have changed from being 14.6 million or 6.4% of the U.S. population in 1980, to becoming in 2003 the largest U.S. minority; in 2006, Latinos comprise more than 41 million people or 14% of the U.S. population. The Latino population went from being in 1980 half the size of the African American population to its current status. Between 1980 and 2000 the U.S. Latino population more than doubled and it accounted, in the same period, for 40% of the total population growth (Saenz n. pag.).

The data makes possible to comprehend the scale of the population subjected to visibilization and invisibilization dynamics and may also indicate the stakes involved in understanding the process. Of course, this more recent immigrant population joins what could be called the historic Latino populations of the U.S, including Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, whose neocolonial histories of resistant nationalisms and citizenship struggles have created one of the dominant frameworks for an understanding of Latino populations in the United States.

Without fully reiterating an analysis developed elsewhere (Poblete *passim*), it will suffice to say here that the mass migration of Latinos in the last quarter of the twentieth century altered the social and political landscape of the U.S. It thus challenged the previous U.S. and Latin American-based ways of studying the national and international dimensions of Latin/o Americans. In the U.S. context those forms of study were called Ethnic Studies and Latin American (Area) Studies. While the first one dealt with populations becoming and being recognized as "in the process of becoming" ethnic minorities in the nation, Latin American studies were focused on populations located in a different geocultural and

geopolitical area. Central to the first paradigm was the notion of a dominant white majority and thus of ethnic minorities in the process of differential integration to that core. Crucial to the second paradigm was the bounded nature of the area and its internal coherence and logic. To put it briefly, these central tenets structuring U.S. Ethnic studies and Latin American studies are now in need of serious reconsideration. Latino Studies can be one of the spaces where that thinking takes place. This essay does not engage with the full task of thinking the stakes of the dialogues between Area and Ethnic studies dealing with globalized Latin/o American populations, (for some approaches see Poblete, Gutmann, et al.). More modestly, it focuses on some aspects of the interaction between social and critical research imaginations as pertaining to Latinos in the U.S. For that purpose, I will analyze the dialectics of visibility and invisibility affecting ethnic and migrant populations in the U.S. I will conclude with a reading of *A Day Without a Mexican*, a film that helps problematize these dialectics.

### **The Social Sciences and the Imagination of Latinos**

U.S. Latinos are today in a very particular condition. They are often times invisibilized as political actors and, simultaneously, highly visibilized as publics, audiences and consumers. If following Néstor García Canclini (Culturas 288) and John Tomlinson, deterritorialization as the dominant cultural experience of globalization is understood as the loss of the natural or naturalized relation of culture with geographic and social territories, then it can be said that many Latinos in the U.S. are subjected to two contradictory processes of deterritorialization. On the one hand, they are often structurally pressured to displace themselves to the United States by the combined effect of the destructure of their living conditions in their countries of origin and the demands for cheap labor in the country of destination. On the other hand, they are being reterritorialized ethnically and economically as consuming publics. They partially stop being citizens in order to constitute themselves or be constituted as consumers. The second part of this essay will deal with this tension between (cultural) citizenship and cultural consumption. The third part will use that discussion in the analysis of *A Day Without a Mexican*.

In this first part, I will present four different social science attempts to rethink the forms in which Latinos are socially produced in the U.S. The work of the linguist, the two anthropologists, and the sociologist to whose efforts I will refer here, make evident what socially located discourses and research protocols allow to see and not see in connection with U.S. Latino populations. That in turn may allow the positing of some of the tasks Latino Studies faces as an expansion of nation-based political and epistemological imaginations.

In *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse*, Otto Santa Ana reminds us of the power of discourse to constitute reality. While the two anthropologists

to whose work I will refer below use a Foucauldian framework to make similar points, Santa Ana uses cognitive science and in particular cognitive metaphor theory as developed by George Lakoff and others, to claim that “metaphor is the mental brick and mortar with which people build their understanding of the social world” (xvi). Therefore, the study of the metaphors used in the 1960s and 1990s to refer to Latinos make clear the differential impact of two different ways of metaphorizing racism. Through these two different metaphoric systems, “the public’s concept of Latinos [was] edified, reinforced and articulated” (Santa Ana xvi). Accordingly “metaphor, as expressed in public discourse, can be studied as the principal unit of hegemonic expression” (Santa Ana 9). According to Santa Ana if the presiding metaphor to refer to Latinos in the 1960s and before was that of the “Sleeping Giant,” (Santa Ana 8-9) during the late 1980s and 1990s the image was that of a “brown tide rising.” The image of “dangerous waters” (Santa Ana 72) served to dehumanize Latinos and was and still is instrumental in the deployment of the two other prominent metaphors organizing American public discourse about Latinos: the nation as body and the nation as house. The house is threatened by the waters, the body can be infected by external agents and disease. What these two preconceptual understandings of the nation produce is an organic and individualistic organization of every day knowledges which privatizes the semantic field of the nation. This at a time when both American individuals and homes, as the “bounded finite space of a nuclear family”(Santa Ana 271), are more connected to and dependent on global flows of people, communications and goods than ever before. As a result, Latinos are constituted by a set of metaphoric definitions that fix the limits of social identities:

1. Immigrants possess less human value than citizens.
2. Citizen is defined, not in legal terms, but culturally as follows:
  - a) be a monolingual English speaker,
  - b) have an Anglo-American cultural orientation,
  - c) consent tacitly to the U.S. racial hierarchy.
3. Latinos are immigrants” (Santa Ana 285).

In this way, Santa Ana reminds us of the need to be vigilant about the language mainstream journalism, policy makers, and public opinion use in describing Latino populations. Its almost invisible power to “produce” social reality may not easily be changed at the level of preconceptual understanding but can certainly be faced and challenged once its constitutive mechanisms are known and rendered visible.

Nicholas P. De Genova has explored, from an anthropological viewpoint, what he calls the theoretical status of the concept of “illegality” and the resultant “deportability” of the undocumented migrant. Following Michel Foucault, De Genova stresses the ways in which legal norms are capable of producing the historical condition of subjects. In this way, De Genova wants to understand not the supposedly “objective” status of illegality of Latino migrants

but the socially active forms through which they are produced discursively. This, then, means to study not so much a condition as a process, not so much the “illegality” as the juridical, cultural and socio-economic “illegalization” of migrants. De Genova wants to defamiliarize and denaturalize analytical categories in order to open new possibilities of research and intervention. From this viewpoint, *to separate* the legal condition of migrants (their illegality) from the rest of the sociopolitical and cultural connections which constitute them *in relation to* other legal subjects, to economic and labor macro processes, for example, is to unnecessarily identify with the perspective of the state: that is, to see as a state.

Reviewing the history of immigration policies concerning Latinos in the United States, De Genova concludes that those policies—which include cycles of regularization, legalization, amnesty and programs such as the Bracero one in the context of World WarII—can be described as a series of complicated and calculated state interventions aimed at regulating, administering and taking advantage of the flows of immigrants. In this way, those policies seek not to physically *exclude* the immigrants but to *differentially include* them under a specific condition: their vulnerability and deportability. This disciplined and subordinated condition of the migrant labor force has, as may be expected, a high productivity for those American economic sectors, which depend to a considerable degree on the availability of an extraordinarily cheap labor force who lack most of the rights that still protect other workers in the national context.<sup>1</sup>

The migrant, thus constituted, is the object of two contradictory but complementary processes. They are highly visible or visibilized in the conceptualizations of the state, the social sciences and politics while, on the other hand, the economic and legal processes conforming them are permanently invisibilized and naturalized. This complex operation requires what De Genova calls “the spectacle of ‘enforcement’ at the U.S.-Mexico border” and of the “illegal” migrant through which the state makes the immigrants “visible” in their “illegality,” while it simultaneously invisibilizes the productivity of the law and the complicity of its own economic and migratory policies. “Illegal” migrants are apprehended routinely and almost ritually at the border as part of a spectacle for the internal consumption of the American public and they are then returned, without process, to Mexico, where they will try to cross once more (De Genova 436-37).

In *Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People*, Arlene Dávila, another anthropologist, studied the process through which individuals are transformed into consumers and populations turned into markets (Dávila 7). If at the level of politics participation translates into power, then Latinas in the U.S. continue to be the victims of their invisibility. Their demographic participation has no real correlate or equivalence at the realm of political power. If on the other hand the market is considered as a social space where participation translates into consumption and public recognition by commercial and business interests, then Latinos have acquired

greater degrees of visibility. Dávila's thesis is that this visibility/invisibility relationship occurs to the detriment of an understanding of the true complexity of Latina populations in the U.S. and it entails a limitation on the possible forms of their political participation. Therefore, Latinos are defined fundamentally from a cultural, not a political perspective. Thus they are [re]presented through highly influential mediatic identities (representations) as a culturally homogenous people defined by a single language (Spanish), a series of traditional family values and one religion (Catholicism). The "truth" about Latinos is produced by a set of specialized discourses developed by multiple agents who constitute a mediated or negotiated identity.

Central to that production of knowledge is the work carried out by marketing companies. Their strategy depends on claiming "authenticity" and "ethnic knowledge" before the marketing needs of (mostly large-cap) American companies engaged in the effort of targeting those audiences or potential publics. A number of racist stereotypes are mobilized to produce a series of Latino "values," a Latino "look" and an image of Hispanics defined first by their permanent lack of acculturation within American culture and society, and secondly by their constant need to reconnect with Latin America. Though the overall situation has improved in the last decade, there still exists a dominant vision, which thus reduces Latinos to a permanently foreign minority. This in turn sits well with the prejudices of a white majority then capable of invisibilizing the existence of millions of Latinas or Chicanos who are bilinguals or English monolinguals, many born in the U.S. and descending from numerous generations who have long inhabited the neocolonized territories of the American southwest. Such an image of a homogenous Latina nation characterized by its permanent foreignness and its indefinite or unfinished acculturation, is instrumental to the interests of those who wish to neutralize the Latino factor and their emergence or presence as a political actor in order to continue imagining themselves as members of a white and Protestant nation adorned by some ethnic minorities (African American, Asian American, Latinas, etc.) which, in the best case scenario, must be acknowledged culturally in their fiestas and celebrations, in their meals and music, but not in their political agencies and/or demands.

Dávila's excellent critique of socially constructed Latino foreignness is nevertheless compromised by her inability to see to what extent the foreignness depends on a monolingual national imaginary, which although still prevalent, is not the only way of conceptualizing the nation. In this sense, the contrast between the growing demographic importance of U.S. Latinos and their socially constructed foreignness, may actually be making visible not just a social exclusion that invisibilizes monolingual English Latino populations, but also the limitations of a monolingual, monocultural U.S. imaginary shared oftentimes by conservatives and progressives.

Finally, Saskia Sassen has proposed to study cities in times of neoliberal globalization as spaces where the emergence of new

subjects and new locations for politics can be detected. Global cities, insofar as they are the result of partial de-nationalizing processes, are a particularly powerful example of that emergence and posit the possibility of a reinvention of citizenship in the global era (Sassen 21-22). With the transition from the welfare to the competitive state, with mass migrations and high unemployment rates (which disconnect youth, and especially ethnic youth, from the realm of work and the state), and with the ascendancy of the market to the category of regulatory mechanism for the social, citizenship as an institution may be changing in radical ways. According to Sassen, citizenship—historically strongly associated to the Nation-state—is crucially strained by the opposition between its concept as a legal status and its condition as a normative or ideal project (9). Located in the space opened by this opposition are both the frustrated hopes of those ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities for whom the formal status as citizens is not enough to guarantee their effective political agency, as well as the social practices of those not acknowledged as citizens (the undocumented migrants) who have been able to establish an “informal social contract” with the host societies. Thus, undocumented migrants through their daily labor, schooling, religious and cultural practices are in fact grounding the basis of their claims to citizenship. In their condition as residents of the globalized city, these informal citizens are expanding the meanings of citizenship at a time of transformation of the national. This city, in a process of de-nationalization due to the combined effect of mass migrations and the emergence of the global market and transnationals, which are its most notable agents, is part of a new geography of politics and the political. In the city, the poor, the displaced, and the migrants move in the same urban space as the powerful and hyperconnected to the global context whom they serve in their restaurants, bathrooms, taxies, hotels, and homes. According to Sassen, those migrants acquire a new visibility, a presence, which despite not being directly linked to an increase of their real power, can still be conceptualized as the possibility of a new form of politics (21-22).

While acknowledging the importance of undocumented Latino migrants to American society, Nicholas De Genova saw the need to investigate their highly profitable and exploitative form of conditional social inclusion in the calculated crevices opened between state law/practice, and economic and business interests. Arlene Dávila was concerned with the forms of social construction of Latinas that condemn them to inhabit a permanently liminal space in relationship to the mainstream nation, thus obscuring the true diversity of the Latina population and limiting their political potential. In both cases, the critical possibilities of using the nation-based model of differential integration into the nation as a lens to understand the liminal place assigned to Latinos in the American social imaginary were seen operating brilliantly.

Saskia Sassen was interested in a different type of space and a different form of visibilization that arises from such a space. The distance between the legal separation and the relative *de facto*



social incorporation was thought not from the viewpoint of the national framework but from a global perspective that sees cities as new social, political and economic laboratories under globalized conditions. From this angle, the issue was less to understand degrees of social, political, and economic integration into a national space than to reevaluate the nature and possibilities of globalized urban spaces to account for new social, cultural, political, and economic dynamics. The liminality comes here from the already mentioned distance between legal status and labor practice and from the coexistence in a complex but unitary environment of radically differently globalized populations.

Finally, Otto Santa Ana reminded us of the powerful force pre-conceptual metaphoric schema have in shaping our category-formation processes. Santa Ana's study suggested to what extent we are invested in fixed territorial imaginings of the nation and the body when it comes to thinking socially. These four examples of creative social science analysis have been offered here as way of illustrating the dis/connections between critical research, political, and social imaginations at the intersections of regional, national, and transnational processes. The topics these analysis have highlighted—the social production of dynamics of relative inclusion/exclusion, visibility/invisibility; the spaces opened in the crevices between state norms and legal discourses, on the one hand, and economic and sociological processes involving migration and cohabitation, on the other; the power of discourses, both social and scientific to shape and limit our understanding of reality—are all crucial issues for a rethinking of the limits and possibilities of Latino Studies in a global context.

#### **Citizenship and Cultural In/Visibility**

Santiago Castro Gómez has an excellent reflection on the social sciences following Aníbal Quijano and Gayatri Spivak, in what he calls epistemic violence imposed by those sciences on the Latin American object and subjects in the process of "imagining the other," in which he has conveniently summarized the changing forms of social control during modern and postmodern or global times (Castro Gómez 145-46). His argument concerns me here insofar as it alludes to the forms of visibilization/invisibilization of subaltern populations in times of neoliberal globalization. According to Castro Gómez, Michel Foucault's characterization of modernity as a process of increasing governmentality ruling over massive populations through disciplinary mechanisms needs to be complemented and corrected by a different form of governmentality that was constitutive of the project of modernity. In Latin America, as Beatriz Gonzalez Stephan has shown, Foucault's emphasis on disciplinary powers and practices and their ability to produce docile bodies, meant a central role for the coordination of such processes under the expanding liberal state. Constitutions, manuals of manners, grammars, labor practices, temperance societies, etc., were all forms through which proper national[ized] citizens could

be formed. While this process was in the 19th and early 20th centuries and may still be today central to the formation of disciplined citizenries, Castro Gómez adds, it occludes the systemic connection between such processes and the formation of capitalism as a world system (152-53). In fact, as Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo have insisted, this world system is constituted by the dual and necessary alliance of an expanding capitalism and a colonial power manifesting at the social level through key subject-formation concepts such as “race” and “culture” (Quijano 221-22; Mignolo 17). Capitalist exploitation goes hand-in-hand with a system for the production of differences between colonizer and colonized. This alliance is made possible by an active imagining of social worlds based on the coloniality of power and the coloniality of knowledge. Castro Gómez calls this process a dual governmentality whereby the modern state produces, internally, docile populations, while externally, metropolitan states actively produce the categorical distinctions (civilized/barbarians; whites/colored people, etc.) that will ensure and legitimize the flow of wealth and resources from the colonized to the colonizing regions (153). This world-system is best described as simultaneously modern and colonial (Mignolo 13).

According to Castro Gómez, the social sciences were born and were thus complicit in this world-making system:

The social sciences functioned structurally as ‘an ideological apparatus’ which, inwardly legitimated the exclusion and disciplining of those people who did not fit the subjectivity profiles the state needed in order to implement its modernizing policies; outwardly, the social sciences legitimated the international division of labor and the unequal terms of exchange and commerce between the center and its peripheries. (154)

Globalization as a new stage of modernity has meant the end of this system of direct control and production of the social under the coordinating gaze of the state and the formal and practical disciplines. Unfortunately though, it has not meant the end of exploitation and racism. Thus, the task of critical social sciences today is, for Castro Gómez to make visible the new invisibilized forms of and for the production of the social (Castro Gómez 159). These new forms are ever more insidious and penetrating, says Castro Gómez, to the extent that they are now based not on direct control but on the active promotion and celebration of marketable differences and pleasurable symbolic goods often representing those differences (156). They also and centrally, I would add, firmly link the U.S. and Latin America because both the marketers and the populations/markets involved are increasingly transnational: as are the forms of cultural imaginaries they produce.

Thus, for Castro Gómez “culture” as control and as a negative colonial difference was instrumental in the functioning of the modern system, while cultural consumption may be the shape that (indirect) control takes in neoliberal global times (145-46). Nevertheless, in Arjun Appadurai’s terms again, it is worth recalling that while social imagination has been one of the vehicles through which

modern national citizens are controlled, it is also “the faculty through which the collective patterns of dissent and new designs for collective life emerge” (“Grassroots” 4). For newly globalized Latino populations in the U.S., this contradiction often times manifests as a tension between two forms of social in/visibility: cultural citizenship and cultural consumption. It is to them that I now turn.

During the 1980s and 1990s the U.S. was the scenario of a series of social battles that can be encompassed by the names of “culture wars” or “multicultural wars”. What united them were the efforts of different groups—who had been the victims of multiple forms of social, cultural, economic, and political subordination—to make themselves visible and heard in the national political arena. These groups included women and ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities. Often times their demands for inclusion within the national polity took the complex form of a demand: first, for the recognition of a constitutive difference from the normative white, Western, male-centered model. In other words, these groups understood that any possible *universalizing* solution to the myriad ways of discrimination within society would have to start by making visible the proliferation of *singularizing* differences and then by distinguishing those differentials that were part of the problem from those on the basis of which certain claims to specific rights could be made.

Here it is important to distinguish between two structural forms of multiculturalism. One form takes place at the state level and produces policies, laws and institutionalized practices—affirmative action and bilingual education are two prominent examples that come to mind. Another is a form of multiculturalism that is the actual direct result of the social and demographic transformation of the United States: here society is diversified not by direct policy-making but, for example, by the differential birth rates of different ethnicities and the arrival of massive numbers of immigrants, both legal and undocumented.<sup>2</sup> The first type of multiculturalism is actively seeking to administer the phenomena the second one embodies. There is a third sense of multiculturalism that refers to organized non-governmental social discourses and practices which promote various agendas to somehow link the first two types: governmental policies and practices, and actual social diversity.

At this level, it seems also important to remind ourselves of the obvious: that the so-called culture and multicultural wars of the 1980s and 1990s in the U.S. were not the expressions of an exclusively national American reality, but of a globalizing process affecting in similar ways many other national situations. In other words, American multicultural wars were/are to an important degree the specifically American manifestation of globalization as a process in a concrete national context (Brunner 151-64). With that said, I want to highlight the ways visibilizing/invisibilizing social dynamics were incorporated into the preceding argument. Multiculturalism was a national U.S. phenomena which reflected global epochal processes. It revealed the conflicts and negotiations between state policies which sought to administer an ever changing and diversifying population, this population itself, and the multiple

social discourses that non-governmental actors developed in this process. That this has also seemed difficult to perceive in the myriad analysis of multiculturalism and its wars in the U.S., is simply a reflection of how powerful forms of nation-based epistemological and political framings are.

The three key conceptual results of multiculturalism and the culture wars in the U.S., and of the broader process of globalization of the U.S. national condition they were manifesting, were “the politics of recognition,” “cultural citizenship,” and “cultural consumption.” The first concept was developed by Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in his well known essay published in 1992. In it Taylor states: “[. . .] misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need” (26). From this platform a dual demand took shape: minorities in western liberal societies were entitled to both the recognition of their constitutive differences and simultaneously, of their essential human equality with the mainstream. Another theoretical concept where that tension manifested was “cultural citizenship” as defined in the pioneering work of Renato Rosaldo, William Flores, Rina Benmayor and their group of collaborators in the Latino Cultural Studies Group in California. Latino Cultural citizenship was defined as follows:

Cultural citizenship names a range of social practices, which taken together, claim and establish a distinct social space for Latinos in this country. [. . .] we hypothesized that “empowerment is a process of constructing, establishing and asserting human, social and cultural rights. These values and rights organize individual and collective identities and practices. We are describing this process as the expression of cultural citizenship” [. . .] Agency is critical to the concept of cultural citizenship: it reflects the active role of Latinos and other groups in claiming rights, [. . .] “a key element of cultural citizenship is the process of ‘affirmation,’ as the community itself defines its interests, its binding solidarities, its own space and its membership [. . .]” (Flores and Benmayor 12-13)

As such, cultural citizenship was a conceptual effort to express the ways in which minority populations under new globalized conditions could simultaneously claim “the right to retain difference, while also attaining membership in society” (W. Flores 262). In other words, cultural citizenship was the name for the social and cultural actions of newly globalized formal and informal political actors embarked in the process of defining their specific way of incorporation into U.S. society. In that effort, they have also helped redefine and reimagine the limits and possibilities of the United States as a social, political, and cultural entity.

Like the “politics of recognition” and “cultural citizenship,” the political reading of the concept of cultural consumption was born of an effort to account for the expansion of the formal

limits of political citizenship in contemporary liberal societies. In this sense, cultural consumption would be the manifestation of a civil grammar constructed through discourses and, among others, practices of consumption whereby the limited state driven grammar of political participation and rights is expanded to incorporate everyday life and the meanings it generates. From this viewpoint, cultural consumption is today directly tied to the transition from *Gutenbergian* and 18th century concepts of citizenship based on formal rights and written culture within a national bourgeois public sphere to a socio-communicational form of citizenship based on audiovisual participation in a mass mediated and transnational public sphere. Cultural consumption is here one of the most common forms of social thought in an information-based society and thus, it is full of political possibilities (García Canclini, *Consumidores* 68-69).

While the politics of recognition have been criticized for reducing the problem of minority cultures to issues of liberal tolerance, the concepts of cultural citizenship and cultural consumption have been charged with cultural reductionism and an obfuscation of the structural inequalities regulating both class differentials within national societies and very unequal cultural flows and conditions in the international arena. In fact, as William Mazarella states, theories of cultural globalization and the cultures of globalization have oscillated between two positions. On the one hand, the celebration of the capacity of social movements and microactors to mediate and produce in their daily lives the real experiential meaning socio-economic and political macrostructures have. On the other, the emphasis has fallen on the policies and politics of cultural globalization as highly regulated forms of administering differences by way of controlling knowledge and institutional practices. In the latter version, global culture would not be the repetition of sameness at a global level, but the planetary organization of diversity. In this way, while it seems clear that the access to and cultural differences themselves have proliferated in everyday life at the global level, it is also true that those cultural differences have been shaped by the efforts to channel them in ways that are administrable and commercially exploitable (Mazarella 350-51).

George Yúdice offers one of the most sophisticated attempts at reconsidering the confluence of these issues in today's global scenarios in his *The Expediency of Culture: The Uses of Culture in a Global Era*. According to Yúdice, the new meaning of culture as a resource implies a displacement of all previous understandings of the concept. Culture today would not be as relevant as an ideological representation or as the source of symbolic distinctions between social classes. It would neither be as relevant as a set of habit-forming disciplinary institutions nor as ways of life which separate high from low culture. In the epoch of its globalization, culture is above all a resource for other ends, which involve a full reorganization of the social according to the administrative logic of governmentality. What is being administered then is cultural diversity itself. Culture becomes a social resource to the extent that it is useful to administer the diverse and multicultural composition of a population; it lends

itself to implement development strategies based on cultural services and goods; and it becomes the basis of a productive economic model grounded on knowledge and information. Culture becomes thus part of a new economy capable of transforming cultural and social resources into administrable and appropriable property. "Cultural power," for Yúdice is not simply the manifestation of communities' self-empowerment but also a way of administering those communities through the multiplication of commodities and the formulation of cultural policies, which suggest both the modern possibility of emancipation and the global postmodern regulation of biopower (25).

Thus we have come full circle to Santiago Castro Gómez' rendering of the new, more insidious ways of social control in postmodern and global times: the active promotion and celebration of marketable differences and pleasurable symbolic goods often representing those differences. However, what for some authors may seem the new pervasive ways of social control, for others can be described as the tensions between two forms of social organization coexisting today under neoliberal globalization. While the state is far from disappearing as an organizer of social life and regulator of its practices, it is often at odds with a different actor performing similar roles. Thus, for example, while U.S. politics have been moving in the direction of reactionary measures such as the legal attacks on affirmative action, bilingual education, and immigration, market forces have developed in the opposite direction ever more responsive to the actual social diversity constituting U.S. society.

This is not a new development. Industrial modernization, as Toby Miller has remarked, was already working under the effects of that contradiction: "Commercially determined industrialization and governmentally determined education were frequently uncomfortable with one another. Each pursued the popular for what could be divergent ends: monetary gain and civic conduct." (6) Today, continues Miller,

The texts we read, the ways we read them, and the uses we make of those readings are produced by converging and diverging procedure that govern us but are susceptible to—in fact, constitutively composed of—contradiction. Their multiple perspectives on the person both enforce and weaken the disciplinary procedures of cultural capitalism. Meaning, self, and money are forced up against one another in the arts of state. (13)

Of the many points of intersection of the state, the market, and multicultural populations living under conditions of neoliberal globalization, I want to concentrate here on a few highlighted in the film *A Day Without a Mexican*. How foreign are the foreigners? How do we see and interact with them, and how are they represented through the mass media and thus consumed as images and representations? Finally, who is us? Put another way, how do we live, in our everyday experience, the intercultural nature of our globalized lives in the United States?

### The Visibility of the Social in Film: *A Day Without a Mexican*

*A Day Without a Mexican* was the brainchild of the collaboration of husband and wife Sergio Arau and Yareli Arizmendi. It was created in two stages. First as a celebrated 28-minute documentary (1998) and then as a full-feature film (2004). In its first incarnation it was a direct reaction to the xenophobic policies in California under governor Pete Wilson as manifested in measures such as Proposition 187 and the rolling back of bilingual education.

From its very origins, the film has been the result of the interaction of art, art-based activism, media representations, transnational media corporations and social imagination. The short documentary was produced under the sponsorship of the Mexican Fine Arts Center and Museum in Chicago. The original idea for the project came to Arizmendi and Arau while in New York:

I was visiting New York with my wife (actress Yareli Arizmendi, who co-wrote the film with Arau and Sergio Guerrero and also plays its lead character), and they were having a 'Day Without Art' to call attention to all the artists who died of AIDS. Suddenly we realized that's what California needed—a day without Mexicans (Gutoff n. pag.).

The film was based also on one of the least observed side-effects of global migration: the way in which it makes the immigrant peripheral bourgeoisie newly and directly aware of the workings of social, racial, cultural and political discrimination. In Arau's own experience of living in California:

I arrived in 92 to San Diego. If you don't speak English even the supermarket cashier treats you badly. And I am urban, I have read my books and have some education, so imagine somebody coming from the countryside. [. . .] Our idea originated in connection with proposition 187. In my case a number of additional factors contributed. I did not speak English and I had left for the U.S.. I had a terrible depression, I felt another type of discrimination. I felt invisible. To top it all, 187 created a heavy anti-Mexican environment. (González n. pag.)

The feature film (2004) cost two million dollars, which were invested by a mixed set of Mexican and Spanish private companies (Plural Entertainment, Televisa Cine, Altavista Films and Organización Ramirez) and one Mexican public institution, Fidecine, which financed the final stages of the production.

Generically the film belongs to what has been called mockumentary or mock-documentary. Explaining their preference for the latter term, Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight state two reasons:

1. because it suggests its origins in copying a pre-existing form, in an effort to construct (or more accurately, re-construct) a screen form with which the audience is assumed to be familiar
2. because the other meaning of the word 'mock' (to

subvert or ridicule by imitation) suggests something of this screen form's parodic agenda towards the documentary genre. (Roscoe and Hight 1)

Their explanation brings to mind here some of the key discursive components of *A Day Without a Mexican*. The film is anchored in a parody of a series of highly popular visual formats: "reality and game shows, weather reports, nightly news, talking heads, music videos, infomercials and person-in-the-street interviews" (Guttoff n. pag.). These genres are thus seen as what could be called, following Toby Miller, visible technologies of truth, popularly held logics that can "produce truth" as an accepted fact. Since a good deal of our cultural consumption in today's globalized landscapes belongs to screen texts (from computer based info to TV, DVDs, cell phones, etc.) a reflective parody of media representational conventions, codes, and biases turns immediately and more broadly into a potential analysis of the social construction of reality.

The film plays with the opposition visibility/invisibility at both the media and social levels and sees them as clearly intertwined. It makes an artistic asset of a social problem. The first publicity campaign for *A Day Without a Mexican* was based on seven billboard messages posted in Los Angeles which read, some in English and some in Spanish: "On May 14 [the opening day of the film] there will be no Mexicans in California." As expected, the message struck multiple chords with people for whom the imagination of such a day meant very different things. The campaign cleverly and effectively used the power of making relatively unspoken aspects of the social imagination explicit in order to generate controversy and thus free publicity. Soon thereafter editorials followed in CNN, CBS, NPR, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. What the campaign and the film made visible were different social fantasies. They put on screen or gave visible form to two opposing, relatively unconscious desires: a nativist fantasy and an immigrant one. While the nativist fantasy had been embodied by Pete Wilson's attacks on immigrants, the immigrants' had surely played out in the imagination of anybody who has suffered variations of the regimes of alternative visibility/invisibility affecting foreigners and, more specifically, undocumented workers in the U.S. As a social fantasy, the film is not concerned with the plausibility of its central conceit: that a dense fog has fully incommunicated California and that, perhaps as a result of that fog, all Latinos without distinction (legal or undocumented, newly arrived or old inhabitants) have disappeared from the state. As a mockumentary, on the other hand, the film works hard to parody the forms of producing truth through technologies of the visible. This combination of media-based fantasy-desire and truth-telling is constitutive of the shape of social imagination in a culture-based productive regime. One of the virtues of *A Day Without a Mexican* is to make this connection visible.

Fantasies, like immigrants, do not stop at the national borders and this is particularly the case with a film engaged in a form of transnational imaginary. In its original release in Mexico, the film



became the highest grossing Mexican movie of the year while a million spectators saw it in its first week (Alonso Chiong n. pag.). The publicity campaign there was based on the slogan: “Los gringos van a llorar” (“The gringos are going to cry”) giving voice to an old Mexican popular desire incubated since at least 1848. Beyond market-savvy campaigns, the Mexican success of the film may also reflect the newly acquired status of Mexican immigrants in the Mexican imagination. Historically derided as “pochos,” lesser Mexicans or traitors, Mexican immigrants to the U.S. have come a long way away from Octavio Paz’ formulations. Currently the second productive sector of the Mexican economy through their combined remittances, Mexican migrants to the U.S. enjoy now an increasingly influential, if complex, role in Mexican politics, economy and culture. They have pioneered forms of political participation and social imagination that social scientists have alternatively named translocal, transnational or binational (Fox *passim*).

The movie, as it is well known, enjoyed a powerful revival in the context of the May 1, 2006 immigrant support rallies across the nation. At the time of its original release, *A Day Without a Mexican* generated less than 5 million dollars in the U.S.. However, during the six weeks prior to the May 1 demonstrations, DVD rentals of the film produced 13 million in revenue (Terra.com). The filmmakers themselves state on the official Web site of the film ([www adaywithoutamexican.com](http://www adaywithoutamexican.com)):

As filmmakers we felt, beginning in 1994 with California’s prop 187, that the half-truths constantly repeated in immigration discussions needed to be clarified. Using our artistic voice we intended to give form to a strong sentiment of discomfort we perceived in the Latino immigrant community but which up to now had had no clear shape, no loud voice. We believe that immigration reform is the civil rights struggle of our time. [. . .] In the spring of 2006, reality has imitated art. Immigration issues have exploded onto the national stage and currently there is a call for a National Boycott on May 1st. [. . .] All artist dream of changing the world. [. . .] Today the fable has come to life. (n. pag.)

But more than one fable has come to life a propos this film. First and obviously, the May, 1 2006 events were a case of life imitating art—“the film is a classic example of art anticipating reality” (Ramos n. pag.)—or clearly an improvement over the nationalist imagination of social scientists like Samuel Huntington (“According to the experts, Televisa’s science fiction is more verisimilar than Huntington’s sociological study” (Who are we? The Challenges to American National Identity”) (Robinson n. pag.). *A Day Without a Mexican* managed also to place itself squarely in the middle of a transnational imaginary space of great potential profitability by simultaneously tapping, on Mexican sentiments in Mexico *vis à vis* the situation of their increasingly influential twenty five million conationals on the other side of the border, the Latino U.S. experiences of racial and cultural discrimination constituting

a direct market of more than 40 million people, and an American sympathetic audience to whom the film is ostensibly addressed. The film tried hard to reach a level of popularity based not simply on its obvious potential commercial success but also on its capacity to envision a discursive format capable of seducing a wide and transnational popular audience. The satire was deemed more effective if it was able to captivate the interest and political sympathies of the American non-immigrant audience while keeping its hold on the imagination of Mexican nationals and Latino immigrants. Arau has even said that he used the language of American humor because the film was less directed at Latinos “who know their problems” than at educating “gringos” (Smith n. pag.).

It can also be said that *A Day Without a Mexican* inverts or rearranges the process of state governmentality by combining in a product of broad, marketable appeal the high visibility and invisibility to which migrants are subjected in the U.S., according to Nicholas de Genova. Like the multiple national marches of May 1 2006, the film literally makes the migrants work by making them disappear and turning them into an audience, diegetically and extradiegetically, watching the reaction of the rest of society *vis à vis* their disappearance. This sleight-of-hand which makes migrant work visible by turning it invisible was reproduced, in an inverted fashion, by the recent real life demonstrations. While in the film the migrants’ invisibilized contribution to society could only be seen when absent, in real life migrants and their allies turned everybody else in the nation into spectators (in the streets and on the media) of their own emergence not simply as relevant workers but, most importantly, as political actors capable of mobilizing anywhere between three and a half and five million people (Bada, Fox, and Seele 36). Not unlike what Arjun Appadurai described as the Mumbai Alliance of Indian slum dwellers’ social organizations who seek land, adequate housing and access to urban services by making themselves visible to the state through self-enumeration and self-surveillance, *A Day Without a Mexican* as a film, and more decisively, as a social phenomenon, could also be said to have been involved in an imaginative effort to produce a “kind of countergovernmentality” a “governmentality turned against itself” (Appadurai, “Deep Democracy” 36). By making invisibilized migrant and ethnic work visible, *A Day Without a Mexican* became a stimulus to newly emerging national and transnational social imaginations engaged in more horizontal forms of politics and potentially, democratization.

In the end *A Day Without a Mexican* can and should be thought from at least two different angles both indicated by Yúdice’s *The Expediency of Culture*. From one viewpoint, a certain social and cultural experience, that of Latinos in the U.S, is harnessed for the production of a high value cultural text opening a market for a Mexican media transnational company through the collaboration of Mexican intellectuals, transnational capital and an American museum of art.<sup>3</sup> From another perspective, the film was appropriated and one could even say, co-produced by a set of social and political

forces to name their own experience and to serve as the organizing cry at a time those communities needed to come together with new allies in order to exert pressure on a state level political agenda. If the movie alone is an example of the ways in which information-based capitalism can turn the social and the cultural realms into property, associated with a social movement it became also a manifestation of the ways in which through social imagination ethnic populations can empower themselves by appropriating and redefining their forms of cultural consumption. The political moment in this case, resides neither with the text itself nor with the cultural experience of its public and private consumption alone. It instead depends on the articulation of these two moments through the expanded political activities of populations making claims and demanding rights and recognition from the state and dominant society. Multiple forms of political, social, cultural and research imaginations and imaginaries are involved in making that articulation and its full political and cultural possibilities visible. Through its use of interdisciplinary and transnational perspectives, Latino Studies must be capable of contributing to this task.

### Conclusion

The new global condition of Latinos in the U.S. creates a U.S.-based globalized scenario. In that scenario two global situations are placed at the very center of the nation, changing its historical dynamics. This is a process affecting all nations differently. In the U.S. it means, first, that the relative predominance of the new economy of services and information has increasingly created a two-tiered society. One lives in the upper-level of the economy according to standards and expectations we used to call First World status. The second group, those who provide immediate local material services to the global national service sector and the upper and middle classes still working in older industrial sectors, have been radically flexibilized as a labor force. They are either national workers who have been Third World-ized or, often, actual immigrants from Third World countries. These Third World workers in the middle of a First World situation lack many of the protections of traditional workers in the national context, yet are expected to perform and conduct themselves to the satisfaction of those earning a First World salary and enjoying their full citizenship rights. While fully interdependent, there often seems to be very little contact between these two sectors of society separated as they are not just by their cultural and social differences, but also by a magic cloak of invisibility which hinges on the distance between day and night, inside/outside, acknowledged/taken-for-granted, socially-transparent and socially-occluded spaces. However, as *A Day Without a Mexican* works hard to prove, this is an untenable social fantasy for both sectors.

Consequently, the second situation that global conditions have brought to the core of the nation today is interculturality. Nestor García Canclini has referred to a contemporary change in the scale

of interculturality, i.e. a multiplication of the contact between those who are different (García Canclini, "Diferentes" 14-15). The speed, the frequency and the intensity of the exchange are now not simply national multicultural challenges (the coexistence of those who are different within one territory) but intercultural ones. This interculturality then, has become constitutive for the formation of the meaning of the social (as manifested in goods, messages, and identities) always subjected to simultaneous processes of dispersion/explosion and concentration. The study of national culture—here understood as the totalizing ensemble of scenarios where the social production of meaning was socially dramatized within an autonomous semiotic system—has given way to the study of the clashes between meanings at the borders of those semiotic systems. We have moved, concludes García Canclini, from self-contained identities to the processes of interaction, confrontation, and negotiation with others. We are faced with new forms of cultural cohabitation under frequently unequal relations of power (García Canclini, "Diferentes" 39-40).

Latino Studies is one of the spaces where particularly relevant forms of this new cultural, social, political, and economic cohabitation can be thought. Interculturality means now that the work of multiculturalism in the U.S. on the development of tolerance and acceptance of difference must be complemented by the constant negotiation of actual linguistic, religious, and ethnic difference within and without the nation. Again, this is a situation affecting all nations undergoing global processes, though it manifests in specific ways in the U.S. The nation as a political space has thus been penetrated by the logics and the results of the neoliberal, globally-oriented capitalist economy. This disjuncture between the nation and its actual inhabitants creates new spaces for political agency while it also radically affects our understanding of previous forms of citizenship (J. Flores *passim*).

While the issues of the economic standing of Latinos, their social and political integration and participation in the national American sphere, will continue to be of fundamental interest to those communities and consequently to Latino Studies, what has changed—and in so doing has altered those previously alluded to processes—is the cultural situation of Latinos in the U.S.. What is different is the diversity of social imaginaries now present. The national U.S. and the national Mexican or Puerto Rican imaginaries, to name just some crucial ones for the Latino population, have not remained unchanged but continue to play a crucial role in the cultural dynamics affecting Latinos in the U.S.. What is really new is their radical expansion by the force of a form of liminality which for lack of a better word can be called global or transnational. The everyday life positing of this global-social-horizon-of-relevance by the social practice of millions of Latinos engaged in one form or another of transnational experience, from media production/consumption to the physical displacements of seasonal migrants and itinerant workers of all kinds, imposes specific tasks on Latino Studies. One of the most important is that of producing the intellectual categories that can not only explain the dynamics of these experiences, but be useful for their occurrence

in a democratic context of justice, equality, and empowerment. This implies heeding Orlando Fals Borda's classic call for intellectual independence and decolonized knowledges committed to the social and cultural struggles of the populations they study. For now it may be asked, once the national framework has been defamiliarized, once its naturalized cultural presuppositions constituting a particular social imaginary have been made relative, whence but from a radical identification with the essential humanity of the aspirations of their populations to a decent life could Latino studies scholars speak?

Transnational processes do not indicate the overcoming of the limitations and possibilities of national paradigms, but lead to the need of understanding their points of articulation, conflict and tension in the new geopolitical, social and cultural spaces created by the intercultural labor and lives of millions of Latinos. Latino Studies is the institutional space to study these emergent social and cultural geographies as expansions of the limits of national social and epistemic imaginaries. Crucially, Latino Studies must perform this task of rethinking the limits of social in/visibility while keeping the newly conceived national levels as critical spaces for cultural, political, social and economic accountability, and relevance.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lisa Lowe makes a similar point on the "contradictions of immigration and citizenship" as connected to Asian-American immigrants in U.S. history (Lowe 7-8).

<sup>2</sup> Obviously, as we have seen with Nicholas de Genova, these social processes require certain forms of state driven action/inaction to occur. Thus they may be the result of state policies or lack thereof to a much higher degree than initially thought.

<sup>3</sup> *A Day Without a Mexican* became in fact the very successful first U.S. release of Televisa Cine, a newly formed, U.S.-based distribution branch of the Mexican transnational media company, Televisa.

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