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From the Editors

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From the Editors

Cover Page Footnote

This article is from an earlier iteration of *Diálogo* which had the subtitle "A Bilingual Journal." The publication is now titled "*Diálogo: An Interdisciplinary Studies Journal*."

From the Editor

Félix Masud-Piloto

Since its inception in 1995, *Diálogo* has functioned as a collective in the true and best sense of that concept. All the labor is voluntary, everyone involved in the process of producing the publication usually performs different and often multiple tasks, we share ideas in a free and open way, and most importantly, we make editorial decisions with the advice and consent of our diverse constituencies. This special issue on women is a perfect example of our collective spirit. The idea was conceived and discussed openly by our Editorial Board, the labor was equally distributed among our volunteers, and the contents came together after an extensive call for papers and a wide variety of suggestions from our editors, readers, and contributors.

Diálogo number 6 is the realization of two major objectives of our mission: 1) to focus on and pay special attention to issues affecting our communities, and 2) to include in our editorial process the talents and expertise of colleagues in other

universities and the community. To accomplish these two important objectives, we have asked two dear friends and respected colleagues, Marixsa Alicea of DePaul University and Maura Toro-Mourn of Illinois State University to co-edit this special issue on women. As many of you may know, Marixsa is a founding member and Deputy Editor of *Diálogo*, and Maura has collaborated with us from the beginning. *Diálogo* is fortunate and grateful to have the talents of these two intellectuals and activists leading the dialogue on women.

Some of the materials and articles may be controversial, challenging, and even problematic for some, but that is what *Diálogo* is about. We hope that this special issue on women will generate serious discussions about women and other issues of importance to our community.

By Félix Masud-Piloto

!Mujeres!

A special issue of *Diálogo* on Latinas

co-guest edited By
Marixsa Alicea &
Maura Toro Morn

It was Maura who first thought of the idea of doing this special issue of *Diálogo* on !Mujeres! It is her passion for feminist studies and understanding the life experiences of Latinas that motivated her to ask Felix Masud-Piloto to dedicate an issue on this group. Without missing a beat and eager to recruit others to get involved in *Diálogo*, Felix asked Maura to guest edit the volume. Maura then recruited Marixsa to join her on this venture.

As we started the work on this issue, we realized we wanted to do more than just bring together articles and creative pieces that were about or by Latinas. We came up with the idea of creating a volume that would focus on exploring topics not often publicly discussed within our communities such as domestic violence, abortion, mental illness, sexuality and sexual identities. Building on the work of Cherie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa and Juanita Diaz-Cotto, who first broke the silence around these issues, our goal was to offer yet another forum to continue to discuss the difficult issues facing our communities. *Diálogo* seemed the most appropriate forum to engage this

The shadows of her past
Stand as sentinels
She moves forward
Gaining strength
Conquering
One soldier at a time
By Beatrice Figueroa

conversation given its commitment to publish the work of academics, community leaders, artists, activists and students.

The risks of publishing a volume that focuses on some of the social problems existent in our community and discussing taboo subjects are many. All too often academic literature and media that has explored these topics have done so in ways that pathologize Latino communities and family life experiences. In this issue we present alternative accounts that challenge views of Latina women as submissive, deviant, and passive and of Latino families as "pathological." By highlighting issues such as domestic violence, sexual abuse and alcoholism our goal is to challenge narrow explanations provided by outsiders and show how these problems are a direct outcome of the intersection of multiple forms of oppression.

This special volume of *Diálogo* is an attempt to discuss these topics from a Latina perspective. It offers an opportunity for women writers, poets, and academics to create alternative, more politicized, accounts of the problems affecting our communities. Our communities need to understand as Ann Stanford writes why there is a growing number of Latinas in prison. Rather than be silent and feel shame because we

have loved ones in prison, how do we challenge policies and racist attitudes that result in the disproportionate representation of Latinos and people of color in prison? Rather than deny love to our family members in prison, how do we embrace our brothers and sisters and struggle to bring about change in racist policies and practices within our criminal justice system?

Other pieces in this volume remind us that we need to be constantly vigilant of the many faces of racism. Ranguil and Garcia highlight for us the racist representations of Latinas, Mejicanas and Chicanas that are ongoing in film and media. Caridad Suoza's work nicely challenges the negative characterizations of Latinas' and in particular Puertorriqueñas' sexuality. She also addresses the problems of not having more open and healthy attitudes and conversations with young Latinas concerning issues of sexuality. In her work, Suoza helps break the silence concerning young Latina women's sexuality. Jean Peterman also discusses a taboo subject when she shares with us Marisol's story about her experiences concerning abortion. Through Marisol's story Peterman also highlights how Puerto Rican women are beginning to break the silence around these issues and engaging their daughters in conversations about sexuality and reproductive rights.

Yolanda Nieves' autobiographical piece on mental illness, alcoholism and domestic violence helps us to understand the devastating effects this has on families, but just as important her article offers us some of the ways in which Yolanda has not only survived these devastating family realities but also thrived. As an educator in the community, she knows the importance of openly sharing and discussing the pain and consequences of having loved ones who suffer from mental illness and alcoholism. She has bravely stepped forward to share her story and poetry.

In her piece, Gina Perez describes the struggles that Puerto Rican women face as they try to claim space and define home in a city like Chicago where the process of gentrification has taken such a strong hold. This process has simultaneously displaced Latino families and reduced the number of low cost housing, making it ever more difficult for families to find affordable and decent housing near networks of family.

Astrid Suarez, Inca Molina Rumold and Leonor Palomeque share with us the violence and the consequences of war and crime that women, along with others, are facing in Colombia. Their work reminds us that it is not only the violence and injustices that women face in the home and in our U.S. communities about which we need to be concerned, but also the violence women, children and men are subjected to through wars, and repression --violence that results from the ongoing struggles of the unequal distribution of wealth, corruption, economic dependencies on the U.S. and our ongoing struggles to fully free ourselves from the consequences of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Besides including pieces that explore the devastating consequences of oppression and the silence that we maintain within our own communities around abortion, sexuality and mental illness, etc., we have also included articles, poems and creative work showing how women are not only are resisting and fighting back racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of oppression but also thriving. Latina women are

talking back, and voicing the complexity of their situation. They are creating organizations like Mujeres Latinas and Acción, Amigas Latinas, Dignas and Capacitar in El Salvador as a way to fight back systems of oppression, break the silence around issues of domestic violence and sexual orientation and to create a space for themselves where they can heal, grow and learn. They are also meeting informally and creating new and greater numbers of forums for discussing the many problems in their communities. For example, Astrid works actively to bring together women to discuss the war in Columbia and the violence to which she and other Colombian women and families have been subjected. Recently, here in Chicago, Latinas gathered at an event titled - Latina Dialogue - Beyond the Kitchen Table - to share many of the same issues that we are addressing in this volume. A summary description of their conversations and meeting is included in this issue.

Lucretia Ortiz and Michelle Lopez, two women who had been incarcerated, share excerpts of their life histories with us and also the work they produced as part of a poetry writing workshop they attended while detained in jail. They speak about the importance of having had the opportunity to write their story and how poetry helped in their ability to survive. Also included are the poems of young Latinas here in Chicago who are part of the writing workshop Literature for All of Us (Irene Dugan Alternative High School). Here too we see the power of being able to write ones life. Other poets, such as Beatrice Figueroa, Yolanda Nieves, Ann Stanford, Carina Vásquez and others have contributed their work also in the spirit of not only providing us images that help us understand the injustices to which women have been subjected, but also to help us realize the healing nature of poetry.

Finally, we choose to grace the cover and other pages of this issue with the artwork and text of Angelika Bauer and the Mujeres Musalmanas to celebrate women, motherhood, life, earth and the achievements of !Mujeres!

Before we let you read on, we do want to take the opportunity to thank several people who worked alongside of us to create this issue. Beatrice Figueroa went well beyond her duties as managing editor to help us create this volume. She helped from start to finish, helping us identify possible contributions, reviewing articles, helping authors revise their work, identifying appropriate artwork, developing a resource list and formatting the issue. We are grateful for the time she put into this project and for being so patient with us. We also want to thank Juana Goergen, Claudia Morales Haro, Ann Folwell, Stanford, Lourdes Torres, and Carina Vásquez who served as reviewers for this issue. José Placencia and Nely Morales helped us format the issue and create images for the articles. We are also grateful to Félix Masud-Piloto for allowing us the opportunity to serve as guest editors and for giving us extra funding to produce a larger issue on !Mujeres!

We hope you'll enjoy this special issue of Diálogo on !Mujeres! and hope that you will share with us your thoughts about the issue.

Maura and Marixsa