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From the Editor

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We are pleased to present this second issue of *Diálogo* 15, conceived and selected by guest editor Alicia “Achy” Obejas in response to her call, “When You Can’t Go Back: Exile and Dislocation.”

Exile, diaspora, homeland, identity and transnationalism are now concepts in regular use and understanding, and yet personal experience is more elusive. It is through creative works that a better sense is often gained of societal issues, hope and anxiety in self-identity. Exile from original homelands leaves regret, anger, and other emotions invisible to general society. The children of exiled persons as well often feel nostalgia for their parents’ experience, and seek understanding in travel and those around them.

I am reminded of the final image in Tomás Rivera’s landmark novel *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* (And the Earth did not part), which captures a certain feeling of *esperanza* (more than hope, a strong desire for fulfillment and understanding). In that novel a young migrant worker examines life, harsh treatment and family issues, as he travels the harvest circuit from Texas to Wisconsin picking crops during the mid-20th century. In the final vignette, the young protagonist climbs to the top of a tree to look far off into the horizon and think about his future. He detects another tree in the distance, where another small figure has climbed to the top, and appears to wave to him. For the reader—after the despair and difficult issues pursued in this narrative—such an intriguing ending offers a variety of readings, from mirrored action to contact with other souls of similar experience.

It was Thomas Wolfe’s landmark 1940 novel, *You Can’t Go Home* (published posthumously) that opened literary consciousness to considerations of time and memory, a return to old roots in expectation of understanding, contemplations of homeland while living displaced experiences. During the 21st century, what and where is the “home” of so many migrants, exiles, and transnational beings? This issue of *Diálogo* invites an array of assessments on the post-exile experience.

In criticism two scholars explore recent works by Cuban writers Carla Suárez and Reina María Rodríguez, followed by a recent narrative of Rodríguez’s, in translation: a moving reflection on the death of her friend and poet Alexander Blok. “One is from places far away,” states Rodríguez, speaking to us all. In *Diálogo Entrevistas*, an interview with Dominican-American novelist Loida Maritza Pérez that was conducted in the Center for Latino Research

offices some years past, while Pérez was on tour with her first novel, *Geographies of Home*. She explains her artistic drive in creating that novel, as well as observations on the publishing world and Latinos in the US. Excerpts from this interview were published in *Diálogo* 4 (March 2000), this edited version makes an interesting addition to our thematic issue.

Creative writer, journalist and translator of creative works herself, Obejas has collected a variety of narratives and poetry for her special featured section, beginning with an intriguing excerpt of new work from Cristina García, a prominent writer who is herself the child of exiled parents. Her character an aging Cuban émigré, he examines the Biscayne Bay from his hospital bed, recalling experiences from early life in Cuba, as well as those of the US, including his estranged children. Experiences and impressions are contrasted. Despite the proximity of death, the image projected infers a position of privilege: the view from his hospital room a magnificent view of the bay, where he surveys boats and recognizes participants from his own yacht club.

A narrative of meditation follows, by distinguished Latin American writer Ariel Dorfman, born in Buenos Aires but raised in Chile, and who has lived in the US extensively. Most of his writings evoke the trials of exile. Here, upon a return visit to Chile, he surveys a “pillaged wasteland,” both physically and in memory.

Enrique del Risco’s title the story as much as the narrative itself, the physical journey from Cuba to Spain, into exile, serves to reveal deeper-rooted sensibilities and crisp descriptions that tantalize the senses. Much like Dorfman, the account employs a singer, in dialogue with the narrator, to pursue political feelings dialogue and seek understanding of the past. In Adrián García’s essay the Yorùbá myth and spiritual priest (*babalú*) serve to explore the vicissitudes of life and history in both Nigeria and Cuba. In a different manner and through another myth, set in Lithuania, Gint Aras’ account relates family stories, folktales, pre and post-World War II history, to weave a loving journey through memories of ancestor immigrants, concluding with an unforgettable metaphor. The difficult state of an exiled identity is further explored in the creativity of four poets.

Another exile is that lived within, pain and anguish of loss forever present, like that of Mexican poet Javier Sicilia, whose 24-year old son was murdered, along with several other university students, in 2011, their bodies left on

the street in Cuernavaca by the drug cartel. His pain, and valiant voice in protest, has put a face on the suffering of many families, the now 50,000 people killed in Mexico during the five-year course of a “war” not of their choosing. Many of those murdered have been migrants, en route toward the hope of economic relief for their families. Sicilia now dedicates his life to protest, imploring the cessation of the Mexican president’s campaign against the cartels; he insists that all Mexican lives are endangered, that it is now an urgent “matter of public health.” Sicilia founded the Movement for Peace and Justice and Dignity in Mexico, and will now lead a caravan of protest, in late summer of 2012, from San Diego to Brownsville along the US-Mexico border, then to the cities of Chicago, New York, and Washington, DC. Organized by the human rights organization Global Exchange based in San Francisco, the purpose of the caravan is to gain the attention of the US public and Congress. In the US many families suffer the murders and kidnappings of their relatives in Mexico, and are forced to drain bank accounts to meet hostage demands, or “disappear” from contact with their families.

The 21st century has become one of constant danger to migrants and other dislocated people, Sicilia himself now lives a life of constant protest and travel. Last year he stated publicly that he was giving up poetry to dedicate his life to human rights. His last two poems are posted online, the following opening lines are from “El sobreviviente:”

Toda ausencia es atroz
y sin embargo, habita como un hueco que viene de los
muertos,
de las blancas raíces del pasado.
¿Hacia dónde volverse?
¿hacia Dios, el ausente del mundo de los hombres?;
¿hacia ellos, que lo han interpretado hasta vaciarlo?
¿Hacia dónde volverse que no revele el hueco,
el vacío insondable de la ausencia?

The breathtaking artistic images in this issue provided by Chicago-based Mexican-American artist Héctor Duarte, painter, printmaker, and muralist. His work is exhibited in museums in Mexico and the US, and he is co-founder of a print workshop in Zacatecas, Casa de la Cultura in Zamora, and Mestizarte in Chicago. The *mariposas*, butterflies frequently in his works symbolize for him the travels of migrants from small villages in Mexico to various regions of the US for work. Sometimes they return, sometimes they don’t, an experience not dissimilar to experiences in this issue. Sometimes it is impossible to return. The image on our cover illustrates the experience of being out in space, away from homeland and destination.

How to understand that constant feeling of loss that accompanies so many in life? We hope the power of the human spirit and creative word in this issue inspire you, and conjure your own memories, just as Achy Obejas’ collection of reflections and creative works inspire greater

support for human dignity.

Please review our new Calls for Papers and join us with your own works of criticism and inspiration, book and media reviews, commentary and interviews. We look forward to *Diálogo*’s 16th year in dialogue and participation with readers and contributors.