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# Queer Chicana/Latina Feminisms, World-Making and Latinx Geographies

## Una Plática entre Nosotras

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# Queer Chicana/Latina Feminisms, World-Making and Latinx Geographies: Una Plática entre Nosotras

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## Abstract

This paper explores how pláticas can serve as a critical Chicanx/Latinx feminist methodology in geography, not only informing the research we do, but how we teach, mentor, organize and sustain ourselves in relation to our communities. Bridging Chicana/Latina feminist theory and feminist geographies literature, we provide a context for our plática, share our academic journeys, and delve into Lorena Muñoz' path-breaking contributions spatializing queer Chicana/Latina feminisms, theorizing Latinx world-making, and advancing the subdiscipline of Latinx geographies. We consider how pláticas incite possibilities for fostering more caring, equitable relationships inside and outside the academy.

## Keywords

queer Chicana/Latina feminisms, world-making, Latinx geographies, feminist methodology, pláticas, community

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## Introduction

In this paper we share a *plática entre nosotras*, a talk between us, the authors, to collectively voice our experiences navigating the academy as Chicana/Latina feminist geographers. We discuss how we have come to understand queer Chicana/Latina feminisms, world-making and Latinx geographies. Through this exchange we illustrate the power of *pláticas* as a critical Chicanx/Latinx feminist methodology in geography. Translated in Spanish, *plática* simply means ‘a talk,’ but Chicana/Latina feminists have reconceptualized the term as a methodology that is relational, reflexive, transformative and embedded in longstanding Chicana/Latina feminist theorizing and activism (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016; Flores Carmona et al. 2021; Morales et al. 2023). This paper initially began as an interview with Dr. Lorena Muñoz to highlight her contributions advancing critical geography as part of this journal’s celebration of its 20th anniversary. Then Managing Editor of *ACME: An International Journal of Critical Geographies*, Jack Giesecking, invited Madelaine Cahuas to undertake this important task, which she swiftly said yes to. As we, the authors, began to plan for and conduct the interview, we noticed that it was taking the form of a *plática* instead of a more traditional interview format. We dug deeper into why *pláticas* made sense to us by revisiting Chicana/Latina feminist works and feminist geographies scholarship and saw overlapping critiques of extractive forms of knowledge production and calls for critical reflexivity, equity, and accountability throughout the research process. As critical race feminist geographer, Minelle Mahtani (2021) aptly writes, “The format of the interview, question and then answer, doesn’t speak to the complexity of the relationship that actually emerges between interviewer and interviewee.”

By using a *plática* methodology, we attempt to meet each other on our own terms, honoring the depth of our relationship that began when Madelaine was a graduate student, seeking out Lorena as a mentor and that evolved into us being *colegas* (colleagues) and friends. Through *platicando entre nosotras* about our lives and Lorena’s intellectual contributions, we demonstrate how *pláticas* enable forms of theory-making that are grounded in the relationships and embodied experiences of women of color and other marginalized people. Furthermore, we contend that *pláticas* hold potential to rework our relationships with each other as researchers, educators, and geographers, in more equitable, caring and mutually supportive ways that can create spaces of what Lorgia García-Peña (2022) calls, “community as rebellion” in the white cis-heteropatriarchal and neoliberal academy.

In what follows, we further explain how *pláticas* resonate with feminist geographies and can enrich the growing field of Latinx geographies. We also situate ourselves and provide an edited *plática* between us where we make visible how we build theory and community as Chicana/Latina feminist geographers.

## Situating *pláticas* as a Chicanx/Latinx feminist methodology in geography

For decades, Chicana/Latina feminist scholars have been pushing the limits of academic knowledge production by creating alternative methodologies, like *pláticas*, that emerge from, and are responsive to the embodied experiences, knowledges, and struggles

of Latinx<sup>1</sup> people (Calderón et al. 2012; Flores Carmona et al. 2021; Morales et al. 2023). Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) propose five contours of pláticas: 1) They draw on Chicana/Latina feminist theory interwoven with other critical theories that are attentive to intersecting systems of power and the experiences of marginalized people; 2) Participants are understood as co-constructors of knowledge; 3) Pláticas connect everyday experiences and research inquiry; 4) They offer a potential space for healing and 5) Pláticas greatly depend on relationships of vulnerability, trust and reciprocity among those engaged in a plática. In these ways, pláticas reflect how Chicanas/Latinas have communicated, learned, and shared knowledge in their families and communities for generations, and allow for speaking back and forth, asking questions, and imparting experiences. This greatly differs from traditional interviews where the conversation is generally one-sided and extractive (Mahtani 2021). As Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016, 144) explain, using pláticas means “researchers must be willing to share that which they ask of their contributors.” Morales et al. (2023, 3) extend these insights by arguing that pláticas challenge the idea of objectivity by requiring interrogation of one’s positionality and a deep commitment to the communities one seeks to be in conversation with.

Pláticas are grounded in Latinx socio-spatial knowledge sharing practices and are themselves forms of building spaces of healing and resistance across racial, cultural, gender, sexual and generational differences. This can be seen when Chicana/Latina scholars draw on their family’s and community’s knowledges, stories, memories, ways of speaking and relating at the kitchen table, in the home, in our neighborhoods, cities, and all the places we inhabit, to reimagine spaces of teaching, research and writing. For example, Mata-Villalta (2023) recounts how platicando with her mother and aunt over *cafecito* and *pupusas* in her East Los apartment inspired her to use pláticas as a pedagogical tool to center the voices of *Salvi* students in her classroom. Hannegan-Martinez (2023) takes up pláticas to intentionally form spaces of relationship building, reciprocity, and accountability with her former high school students, which radically reorients research as a practice done “in loving relationship with the communities we are claiming to produce research for” (1708). Hamzeh et al. (2023) demonstrate the power of pláticas in opening a conversational space that forges solidarity across Chicana, Arabyya and Palestinian feminists and refuses imposed borders, imperialism, and epistemic violence. This use of pláticas as a method and praxis of solidarity can also be seen in pláticas among Black women and women of color (Hampton and Mendoza Aviña 2023).

These different examples elucidate how platicando is a method of sharing geographic knowledge, engaging in spatial theorizing, creating alternative spaces, and is an inherently spatial and geographic endeavor. As Lopez and Calderón (2023) write, “Our stories, or pláticas thus serve as locations for both reflection and refusal, rather than reinforcing

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<sup>1</sup> We use Latinx as a gender inclusive term that refers to people who trace their roots to Latin America, including Mexico, South America, Central America, and the Caribbean. We recognize that Latinx is an identity that is constituted by difference, emerging from queer, trans, and gender non-conforming people of the Latin American diaspora articulating their experiences, and is constantly being contested and reimaged (Pelaez Lopez 2018). We use Chicana/Latina to reflect how Chicana/Latina scholars have identified themselves and produced feminist scholarship that counters masculinist Chicano/Latino narratives (Espinoza et al. 2018). We also use Chicanx and Latine as gender inclusive terms.

hierarchical matrices of colonial domination and expertise" (1677). Indeed, *pláticas* are places where Chicanas/Latinas can speak unapologetically to resist extractive knowledge production and narrate the world otherwise. Borrowing from literary scholar, Mary Pat Brady (2002, 9), Chicanas/Latinas have long been concerned about the power of space and contesting it through "alternative spatial configurations, ontologies and genealogies," even if largely ignored by the discipline of geography. Despite this exclusion, Chicana/Latina scholars have contributed to reimagining geographical research through numerous alternative methodologies, including queer *pláticas* (Gonzalez et al. 2023), *testimonio* (Cahuas 2022; Faiver-Serna 2019) and *platicando y mapeando* (Puente and Vélez 2023).

Ultimately, *pláticas* continue the efforts of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars to transform research through a decolonial praxis (Fálcon 2016) and parallel methodological innovations in feminist geographies. Since the early 1990s, feminist geographers have called for meaningful engagement with self-reflexivity in the discipline, to better understand how researcher positionality and power relations shape processes of knowledge production (see Nast 1994; Rose 1997). Nagar and Geiger (2007) extend these insights by proposing a 'speaking with' and 'situated solidarities' approach that accounts for how positionality and reflexivity are not stable, but ever-shifting processes, and asks researchers to consider how their work can be aligned with the political goals of structurally disadvantaged communities. In this way, self-reflexivity goes beyond confessing one's privileges or proving authenticity and generates possibilities for scholar-activism (Nagar 2014; Pulido 2008; Routledge and Driscoll Derickson 2015). Nagar's (2014) insightful theorization of radical vulnerability, a praxis of opening oneself to questioning by the people and communities one aims to be accountable to, reveals how trusting relationships are formed to enact situated solidarities.

We draw inspiration from Nagar (2014) and other feminist geographers who have engaged in vulnerable conversations across difference to grapple with the politics of knowledge production, and the workings of the academy. Kohl and McCutcheon (2014) offer a compelling example of how to expand self-reflexivity from a solitary act to what they call, "kitchen table reflexivity," a community practice using everyday talk to grapple with one's positionality and foster more ethical approaches to geographical research. Similarly, Mullings and Mukherjee (2018) share a dialogue reflecting on their past mentoring relationship where they demonstrate how they forged a relationship founded on mutual respect, building trust through vulnerability, and a commitment to a decolonial transnational feminist praxis, which allowed them to support each other as they navigated the challenges of a white neoliberal academy. Feminist geographers' calls for slow scholarship further underscore the importance of resisting the academy's pressure to produce quantifiable metrics of achievement (read: publishing papers and getting grants) and taking the time to have conversations and foster relationships of care with each other as colleagues and even as friends (Caretta and Faria 2019; Mountz et al. 2015; Webster and Boyd 2019). As Manzi, Ojeda and Hawkins (2019, 360) emphasize, place-making as "the construction of rooted networks" and relationships, is critical to supporting the wellbeing of early-career geographers navigating a precarious neoliberal academic landscape. Furthermore, queer and trans feminist geographers through a "queer epistolary" method and letter writing demonstrate the power of friendship as social activism and solidarity building to collectively confront intersecting systems of cis-heteropatriarchy, racism, ableism and settler colonialism that constitute academic spaces (DasGupta et al. 2021, 492).

Emerging scholarship in the growing field of Latinx geographies also reflects a conversational, collaborative, and collective praxis (Faiver-Serna 2019; Latinx Geographies Collective et al. 2023; Zaragocin Carvajal et al. 2022). As Faiver-Serna (2019) recounts, Latinx geographies emerged through junior scholars forming collaborative relationships and creating spaces for intellectual and personal conversations where they could vulnerably share their stories, desires, and curiosities. The Latinx Geographies Collective et al. (2023) explains how virtual cafecitos or coffee hour spaces during the pandemic were crucial in bringing people together to listen, offer support, encourage each other, and strengthen relationships, which also facilitated conversations theorizing Latinx geographies. A recent roundtable dialogue by Zaragocin et al. (2022) also demonstrates the importance of conversations across different positionalities and geographic locations to deepen understandings of Latinx geographies in relation to Latin American geographies. While these authors do not explicitly use the term *pláticas*, their work can be read in line with Chicana/Latina feminist *pláticas*, as they destabilize traditional notions of how knowledge is produced and reimagine theory-making as a collective endeavor among women of color.

In this paper, we intentionally use the term *pláticas* for multiple reasons. First, we want to make visible the labor of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars who have conceptualized *pláticas* as a generative methodology for disrupting traditional hierarchical research practices and foregrounding embodied and collective forms of knowledge building (Fierros and Delgado Bernal 2016; Flores Carmona et al. 2018; Morales et al. 2023). Second, *pláticas* honor where we know from, and more specifically how we have learned to speak and relate to others through familial and community spaces. In other words, by using *pláticas* we reaffirm how the stories we share are inextricably connected with our multifaceted geographies as Chicana/Latina feminist scholars and simultaneously serve as a method and place for articulating a decolonial feminist praxis. Lastly, by immersing ourselves in *pláticas* we can draw connections between Chicana/Latina feminisms and feminist geographies that can offer lessons for further cultivating an intersectional feminist praxis across the discipline in terms of not only how we do research, but also how we teach, mentor, and treat each other.

We share our *plática* as differently situated Chicana/Latina geographers who have come to understand, relate to, and use *pláticas* in distinct ways:

**Madelaine:** I identify as a racialized, cis-Latina, daughter of Peruvian and Romanian immigrants born and raised in Toronto, Canada, also known as Tkaronto, located on the lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. Growing up *pláticas* helped me to learn about my family's history, the inequities migrants face, and how they resist and create ways to live. On Sundays my extended family would typically gather at one of my *tía's* homes and as they cooked the *pláticas* would unfold, covering the latest *chisme* (gossip), news from back home, their memories of the *chacra* (Quechua word for small farm or plot of land) in Peru, their early years in Tkaronto, the idiosyncrasies of the *señoras* they worked for as nannies and housekeepers, their health challenges, the remedies they pieced together, their unwavering faith, and what we (my cousins and I) should be doing. These *pláticas* were generally playful and left you feeling full, smelling of fried garlic, onions, tomato and *ají*. Sometimes they felt difficult, argumentative, and heavy. Reflecting on these moments, I can better appreciate how *pláticas* enabled my *tías* to carve out a crucial space for themselves to speak freely as immigrant women of color and offer their stories as lessons on how to persist in this world. *Pláticas* with

my community worker compañerxs in Tkaronto, as well as feminist, queer, trans, Black, Indigenous and Latinx geographies friends, colleagues, mentors, and fellow academic mothers, have also enriched my life in invaluable ways and given me insight into the power of pláticas to cultivate reciprocal relationships of support and healing.

**Lorena:** I identify as a queer Latine who is bi-lingual, cross-cultural, and fluidly transnational. I grew up navigating the unceded lands of the Kikapu (Kickapoo), Papago (Tohono O'odham), Cucapá (Cocopah) and Kumiai (Kumeyaay) of what is now Ensenada, Tijuana, Mexico and crossing the Tijuana-San Diego border in the US. As a child of transnational workers, I grew up following my parents' transnational labor patterns. When I started community college in San Diego, I lived in Tijuana and crossed the border daily, at times twice a day. This reality contributed to my borderlands, transnational identity. Pláticas, charlas, and chismes were the ways the oral history of our family was passed down. I was fortunate to have known my great-grandmother, Sarita. She was born in 1898 and lived to her mid 90s. It was a complete joy to gather at her ranch in Maneadero, located about 30 minutes south of Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico where I grew up. My grandmother, her sisters, my aunts, and cousins would get together on Sundays for carne asada after church. My great-grandmother would tell us stories about how the family traveled from Jalpa, Zacatecas in the mid-1800s to Maneadero. My abuelita would tell us about their life back in Zacatecas and the joy of having family land in the ranchito. We did so, with food. These memories smell like freshly made tortillas, frijoles charros (beans), freshly made guacamole and meat sizzling on the grill. The memories I have of these pláticas (talks), influenced my methodological practices. I often engage with queer kitchen table methods (Haritaworn 2022) and testimonios (see Pérez Huber 2009) in the field. Also, as Latinx geographers and friends, I love our pláticas that are and have been incredibly generative not only for my scholarship but also building community.

While our experiences with pláticas are different, they have led us to continue this practice with each other as colegas, friends, mentor, and mentee. To guide our plática we decided on the following questions to focus on: 1) How did you come to geography? 2) Who or what were your key influences in your journey as a student and early-career scholar? 3) How did you navigate doing research close to home and study what you also embody? 4) How does where you know from shape your research in different places? 5) What is Latinx world-making and why is it a useful concept? 6) How do you understand Latinx geographies and how is it connected to world-making? 7) What conversations are happening in Latinx geographies that you find promising for growing the subfield in the coming years? The question, "where do you know from" draws on Katherine McKittrick's (2021, 121) important reframing of the question "where are you from?" that reproduces exclusionary assumptions of who belongs to a particular place or nation-state (see Zuroski 2020). Questions around world-making and Latinx geographies emerge from Lorena's contributions to theorizing these concepts and serve to encourage further discussion.

Like what happens in any plática there were times when we diverged from the questions or went deeper to follow-up on certain responses. We met twice over Zoom for approximately two hours to pláticar for the purpose of this paper in December 2021 and early spring 2022. We also met numerous times outside of these set dates online to pláticar about our lives, from talking about our families, work, sharing advice and other life updates. In November 2022, Madelaine traveled to visit Lorena on her family's ranch in Ensenada, Mexico, where she was able to meet and compartir (spend time with) with Lorena's mother

and long-time family friends. While these meetings and visits were not recorded, our pláticas in these moments have also inevitably shaped our thinking and writing of our plática for this paper. For example, while I (Madelaine) cannot fully articulate it, there was something about driving across the US-Mexico border and being in the borderlands, listening to Lorena's stories of growing up in this place while sharing meals and visiting her mother that deepened my appreciation for everything that she had accomplished, and how where she knows from animates her praxis.

Next, we share an edited version of our pláticas that partly reflects the flow of our conversations and more succinctly draws the reader to key points and themes around how we understand and take up queer Chicana/Latina feminisms, world-making and Latinx geographies in our research, teaching, and community work. We also elaborate on the work of certain scholars that came up in our pláticas to give more context for the reader. Indeed, this paper is structured differently than traditional papers, foregoing the extensive literature review to give more space to our plática. We do this to emphasize how pláticas have helped us as Chicana/Latina feminist geographers to make sense of what we do and build theories that not only emanate from our experiences and embodied knowledges, but also those of the different communities we are in conversation with.

### **Platicando entre nosotras**

**Madelaine:** How did you come to geography?

**Lorena:** I came to geography because of people. I was doing a Master's in Urban Studies at Temple University in the Department of Geography and Urban Studies and my advisor was Melissa Gilbert who is a feminist geographer. That was the first time that I was exposed to geography. I ended up getting a Master's in geography instead because I just fell in love with it. Geography got me thinking about cities theoretically, but my knowledge of cities has always been grounded in community work.

When I started graduate school, I felt like I wasn't doing enough for my community. It was the late 1990s and rates of HIV were escalating among Latinx populations in Philadelphia. I couldn't see myself being in this privileged space without doing something more for communities outside the university. I got involved with a major Latinx non-profit organization doing HIV prevention work, from writing grants to doing outreach at balls at 3am, and this experience offered me a wealth of knowledge that I could then connect with what I was learning in my courses.

I realized that I wanted to take a geographical lens to understand the experiences of women of color, particularly Puerto Rican women's experiences of healthcare and HIV prevention in Philadelphia, which was the focus of my Master's thesis research. I also collaborated with community organizers to create a holistic HIV prevention program and I even got a grant for \$60,000 to fund the program!

As I was working on this project, Laura Pulido came to give a talk at Temple University about environmental racism. When I heard her talk, I decided that she was going to be my supervisor. As a first-generation college student, I had no idea what the process was to get a PhD. So, I only applied to the University of Southern California (USC) to work with Laura. I had no idea you had to apply to a bunch of programs, and I was lucky to be accepted.



I am incredibly grateful to my wonderful geography mentors Michelle Masucci and Melissa Gilbert at Temple. They carefully guided me through my Master's program and prepared me for my PhD at USC. At USC, I understood that obtaining a PhD was possible. I had for the first time a brilliant, supportive Latina mentor that guided me through a program where I was the first US. domestic Latina who would graduate with a PhD in human geography. I will forever be thankful to my geography dream team.

**Madelaine:** I see so many parallels between your journey and mine. I also started off my academic journey by wanting to examine health inequities among racialized immigrant communities. I then was motivated by my experiences doing community organizing to do research with Latinx community workers in Tkaronto using a geographical lens to better understand the challenges they faced navigating the non-profit sector. I am in awe of how you managed to do graduate school while also being so deeply involved in community work. I am curious, how did you go from doing research on Latina health and HIV prevention to working with Latina street vendors in Los Angeles?

**Lorena:** Honestly after working for years in HIV prevention with women and youth in the mid to late 1990s... it was just devastating. We lost people. Many were still dying. Not at the rate it was at the beginning, but it was still happening. When people would get sick it was still seen by society as something that was criminal or that it was your fault. Discrimination against people with HIV was rampant. It was tough to negotiate, and I was emotionally spent.

When taking courses, I encountered the work of Caroline Cartier who was a cultural geographer. I read her dissertation and began connecting what she was saying about conflicts over space to my experiences. I was living in an illegally converted commercial unit close to USC. It was a mixed land-use, vibrant, immigrant and Latinx neighborhood where at certain times of the day the streets were lined with vendors. This brought me back to the landscapes I grew up with in Mexico, from how they set up, what they sold, the sounds and smells, just everything. I wanted to understand how we reproduce aspects of our landscapes of home in a way that they become economically sustainable. How is it that we as immigrants are so maligned and criminalized, but we still take up space? I wanted to bring questions of urban cultural landscape production into my daily world of street vending in Los Angeles and address misconceptions about street vendors.

**Madelaine:** Hearing you speak of your early experiences living in Los Angeles reminded me of Kensington Market in Tkaronto. My father had a store there for over 30 years selling Latin American dry goods like frijoles, masa, nuts, coffee, spices, and traditional medicines. Walking into that store felt like being in Peru for just a moment. It wasn't just what he sold, but the beautiful set-up he carefully crafted, the sounds of música criolla, the people you encountered, long-time family friends, newly arrived folks looking for community and all the stories shared in that space.

I've shied away from doing research on this because I worry about how to do that ethically especially with my family. My dad hated when university professors would send their students to interview him or take pictures for class assignments. I remember him telling one man that this is his place of work and to leave. Witnessing these interactions made me very conscious at an early age of how imposing, extractive, and ignorant researchers can be. I would love to hear how you navigated doing research close to home and if you can elaborate on what it means to approach research with a queer Chicana consciousness that you discuss

in your book chapter (Muñoz 2010). That piece was crucial in helping me reimagine how I could approach research in geography drawing on my own Latina consciousness.

**Lorena:** Yes of course! In 1994 there was a special issue released in the *Professional Geographer* where feminist geographers critically reflected on the politics of fieldwork (see Nast 1994). My mind was blown. I remember Gillian Rose (1997) speaking about negotiating class differences reflected in people's accents when doing interviews in England and that was revolutionary for me. Their scholarship opened possibilities for me because they showed it was necessary to think about how gender, sexuality, class, and power inequities impact how we do research. I was able to build on their contributions by more specifically centering race and the experiences of Latina immigrant workers.

To be honest though, geography was not built for me. I pushed my way in. Sometimes I felt like I bothered people bringing conversations back to race because they have been steeped in their white privilege for so long. Critical geographers like Rickie Sanders (2006) and Laura Pulido (2002) have been articulating these kinds of challenges for years (see also Faria et al. 2019). Still, I academically identify first and foremost as a geographer. Although, it may be strange to embrace a discipline that is still so white and wasn't necessarily kind to me in the beginning, this is because I think with geography all the time.

Let me tell you a story. I was 7 years old. It's summer and I'm in San Ysidro at my grandmother's mobile home right across the border from Tijuana. Everyone in San Ysidro is Latinx or Mexican and only Spanish is spoken there. I had cousins who were around my age, but I was the oldest. We would spend weeks at a time there during the summer, but we needed to always stay within the mobile home park grounds because my cousins were undocumented. Whenever there was something to do outside the mobile home park, I learned at 7 years old to navigate those boundaries and borders because I was the only US citizen in my entire family. I was the one who was sent to the 7/11 convenience store because the migra (immigration police) could possibly be there and take my cousins.

I remember always being scared and they would tell me don't be scared because they can't take you. But living in a mixed-status family, even though I was secure I never felt secure because my cousins weren't secure. No one else in my family was secure. So, I took that responsibility of navigating spatially these challenges, like being the one that talks to the adult or translates. I remember one time crossing the border with my dad, and at the time they didn't ask for papers, only if you were a US citizen and where you were born. I knew certain words in English that I could answer, but my dad didn't speak English. This guard asked my dad if he's a US citizen and who's the first president of the United States. I translated for my dad, and he whispered Lincoln and then I said Lincoln. The border guard said you should be ashamed to call yourselves US citizens and he unleashed all this white supremacist rage and we just had to take it so he would let us cross.

All these experiences have shaped my spatial consciousness and conditioned me to be extra careful with how I move through space and deeply analyze where I am standing. This is also why at first, I didn't tell the Latina street vendors I was doing research with that I was queer. I was worried that they wouldn't accept me, but I was also making an incorrect assumption about their sexuality. In that chapter you mentioned, I discuss disclosing my queer identity to Herminia, one of my participants, who then shared with me that she is a lesbian too (Muñoz 2010). I then realized that I was interpreting street vending landscapes as

heteronormative spaces and being complicit in reproducing heteronormativity even as a queer researcher. I was comfortable asserting my Chicana, Mexicana, bilingual, bicultural and transnational identities in these Latinx spaces, but not my queer identity because of the deeply ingrained heteropatriarchy I had experienced within my community. Once I embraced my queer Chicana consciousness, I was able to reframe my methodology and see that the Latinx street vending landscape is queer. Then more Latina street vendors disclosed their queer identities to me and showed me that there were communities of queer street vending Latinas across the city that I had no idea about. Doing this work was critical to shaping my queer Chicana spatial consciousness and methodology which foregrounds queer of color ways of knowing and being in place (Muñoz 2016a).

**Madelaine:** I am deeply honored to hear your story. When you describe the conditions growing up along the US-Mexico border it brings to the forefront how the border is a profoundly material and violent reality. As Anzaldúa (2007, 25) writes, the US-Mexico border is a “1,950-mile-long open wound.” Listening to the fear you lived with daily, and how at such a young age you took on this immense responsibility to protect your undocumented family members, I am reminded of Menjívar and Abrego’s (2012) theorization of legal violence, whereby the confluence of immigration and criminal law creates conditions that significantly harm precarious status migrants in their everyday lives. At the same time, you and your family lived a life that was as Sandoval (2018, 1759) insightfully articulates, “more than violence.” Sandoval (2018) argues that while undocumented migrants experience vulnerability they engage in what queer Latinx Studies and performance scholar José Esteban Muñoz (1999) calls, disidentification practices, which allow them to transform spaces for themselves and create more ethical futures. I see this in your life and in the way you approach geographical research with a queer Chicana consciousness.

**Lorena:** The border separated my family. Growing up, many people in my family were domestic workers in the US and would go back and forth between Mexico and the US until they got stuck. This is my understanding of the borderlands and the pain and suffering the border causes. Over the last few decades, we have seen border militarization expand just as social, economic, and political crises across different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean intensify, forcing people to flee. We recently witnessed US border agents on horses rounding up Haitian refugees with lassos like they’re animals. This is dehumanization. The situation is urgent. People are dying with this new remain in Mexico policy that was implemented by a conservative right-wing government but that continues to be upheld by our current supposedly more liberal government (see Neusner, Kizuka and Acer 2022). In my teaching I try to get students to understand how structures of power give rise to these kinds of immigration policies that enact violence on real people, families, and children. It’s not some theoretical exercise or metaphor. Lives are at stake.

**Madelaine:** I hear you. What would you say to students who want to study migration, especially racialized students from migrant backgrounds? I ask this because when I first encountered geography it appeared to me that it was mainly white people traveling to different places to do research with people outside their immediate communities. I don’t think this approach is inherently wrong, but I take issue with the idea that doing research at home or with communities that one belongs to, is less onerous or rigorous. Could you say more about that?

**Lorena:** Yes, I have also come across that in geography. However, for me studying yourself and your own community if you're a person of color or person from a marginalized community is rigorous because again lives are at stake. You have that drive to build knowledge for a purpose that will ultimately help elevate your community.

I also think objectivity is a barrier for students. I've come across students who are hesitant to engage in research with their own communities because they don't believe they will be objective and as a result won't be taken seriously. We need to throw this notion of objectivity out the window and instead critically reflect on how our positionalities and onto-epistemologies impact our research. As researchers we influence and co-create the "data" and stories we collect and it's important to guide our students in understanding these processes.

We also need to recognize that even if we belong to the communities we are doing research with, we will never get the whole story. We get bits and pieces and that may lead us to different bits and pieces and that can give us a more comprehensive picture of what's happening, but we can never know everything that's going on. I want students of color to fully embrace who they are, what they know and be proud of the work they are doing with and for their communities.

**Madelaine:** This is why your approach resonates with me so much. Reading your work and speaking with you I feel reaffirmed and validated that my voice, perspective, and research matters. One thing I must be mindful of when doing research with my community is to remember that internally we have a multitude of differences. Even as a racialized Latina, I have the immense privilege of being born in Canada, holding Canadian citizenship, speaking English fluently, and having an advanced degree. My experience is not the same as other Latinx community workers I spoke to who grew up in poverty, openly identify as queer and trans, or are Black, Indigenous, and non-Canadian citizens. This is why I gravitated to Chicana/Latina Feminisms and testimonio methodology in my research because it works to foreground these Latinx experiences that are often silenced or ignored (Cahuas 2022; Perez Huber 2009). Thank you for opening this path for us to do research that speaks from the heart and that comes from a deep compromiso (commitment) to our people.

**Lorena:** There is incredible spatial knowledge in Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities even if it may not be seen that way or valued by the academy. This is why throughout my career I have kept my focus on racialized and marginalized communities. I want to plant little seeds of hope, knowledge, and activism with and for these communities, that may expand into something I cannot fully anticipate in the future.

**Madelaine:** In the last five years, I've heard you talk more about Latinx world-making while also writing about Latinx geographies (see Muñoz and Ybarra, 2019). I'm curious about how you're theorizing Latinx world-making, what this concept can help us do, and how it's related to Latinx geographies. As you wrote, "Latinx geographies are about more than Latinx place-making – they are about how Latinx world-making reveals other ways of world-making, world-seeing and world-knowing" (Muñoz and Ybarra 2019). Can you say more about this?

**Lorena:** I came to think about Latinx world-making through my research with Latinx street vendors in Los Angeles. Observing how they were continuously criminalized and associated with unsanitary conditions, garbage, and disorder in public discourse, I realized that these

narratives were deeply racialized, and I wanted to disrupt them by illustrating the moments and spaces of radical possibility street vendors created.

I want to be careful not to paint a romantic picture of the situation street vendors are living through. They are struggling through oppression, legal violence, police violence, interpersonal violence, and poverty. At the same time, I wanted to highlight how they create temporary spaces of care, joy and resistance for themselves and their families. This is truly radical in a world where street vendors are constantly devalued. This turned into Latinx world-making for me. Focusing on these temporary spaces showed me that Latinx people are not only shaping places, but creating worlds where they value themselves (Muñoz 2016a, 2016b).

I also saw this when doing research with street vendors in Cancún, many of whom are from Maya villages in the Yucatán searching for economic opportunity (Muñoz 2018a). In response to the constant harassment and violent removal by local authorities, street vendors collectively organized to start the *Union de Tianguistas y Comerciantes Ambulantes* in Quintana Roo in the 1990s. For decades, they have been successful in asserting the rights of migrant street vendors and now run 40 different tianguis outside of the tourist zone, attracting 10,000 vendors and 40,000 customers on Sundays (Muñoz 2018a).

What I want to emphasize in my research is that through these tianguis, vendors created their own autonomous zones in the city, which I understood as world-making (Muñoz 2018a). This is because what they were doing wasn't just about making a particular place, they were mobilizing people to envision and actualize a more livable world. They did this by ensuring that street vendors were safe from harassment from state actors and extortionists. They wanted people to have access to an economic and social space, and they also wanted people to access health and education. They hired nurses and rolled out health promotion programs at the markets. They even built relationships with a local university to provide scholarships to vendors and their family members. In all these ways they're creating systems of support for this alternative world they're building and not because they want to be part of this greater Cancún tourism industry. No, they are creating and advancing an alternative vision of the world where everyone can live well. They are working towards an alternative future.

I started to see these kinds of world-making dynamics everywhere I went (Muñoz 2023a, 2023b). For me world-making is a framework to understand how people have agency and resist oppression by creating alternative spaces, places and systems that together make alternative worlds. I'm not saying that through world-making all obstacles and oppressions are removed, but you can navigate them and build something else with other people. When I think about world-making I'm thinking about not only how people see the world, but how they inhabit it and change it.

**Madelaine:** Listening to you, I'm understanding that world-making goes beyond or *mas alla* from place-making. It's about broader connections and ways of being that exceed the formation of a particular place. Is that correct?

**Lorena:** For me, Latinx world-making holds multiple dimensions. It is about recognizing how intersecting systems of power like white supremacy and cis-heteropatriarchy, shape our life-worlds while also understanding that queer people of color navigate these life-worlds and create alternative ones that ensure a future for themselves and those that come after. Latinx world-making is grounded in resistance, activism, and community. Thinking with street

vendors across these different places, they are mobilizing everyday people to do something different that resists the status quo, but this doesn't always require protesting at city hall. They are building mutually supportive relationships and systems of care by and for the community. I've never witnessed a form of world-making that is done by a single person, or that is individualistic and isolated. World-making is embedded in community and oriented in the wellbeing and future of that community.

This can be clearly seen in the case of the Union of street vendors in Cancún I discussed earlier. This can also be seen in the ways Afro-Colombian street vendors in Bogotá collectively organize to exist in public space and maintain their livelihoods in the face of anti-Black racism, classism, displacement, and criminalization (Muñoz 2018b). In Los Angeles, it's the ways queer Latina street vendors formed where they could economically sustain themselves and their families, build social support systems and work to legalize street vending (Muñoz 2016a, 2016b). In my work engaging the stories and everyday survival strategies of incarcerated Latinas in a women's federal prison, world-making is about how they formed a chosen family, and enacted relationships of mutual support and care through food even under these violent conditions (Muñoz 2023b). In all these ways, world-making is about resisting erasure, and creating the spaces, systems and relationships that allow communities to not only exist but thrive in the present and future.

**Madelaine:** Since your work examines and connects world-making across the Global North and Global South would you describe world-making as a transnational framework?

**Lorena:** Yes, but I can better link it to a Latinx geographies framework. Latin American feminist and decolonial geographer Sofia Zaragocin (2021) recently wrote an article that reflects on the connections between Latinx geographies and critical geography in Latin America. She asks whether Latinx geographies should travel and engage with Latin American critical geographies and vice versa, as well as what are the implications of this engagement? For me, this brings up the tension and complexity of doing research and political work across north and south.

As I explained earlier, I've long been interested in studying mobility and borders stemming from my own experiences as an immigrant and growing up in the US-Mexico borderlands. My family and I continuously crossed the border for work, visiting family, school, and other opportunities. In a way, I've embodied a transnational way of being and seeing the world, which has made borders incredibly problematic for me not only physically, but intellectually and ideologically.

It's always frustrated me how there has been this strict maintenance of borders across Latino Studies and Latin American Studies. Once you are doing research south of the border then you and your work become part of the realm of Latin American inquiry, without fully understanding that knowledge, people's ideologies, dreams, oppression, and white supremacy don't have passports at the border. Or, vice versa, when doing research with Latinx people in the US means that it is disconnected from Latin America. I could never stop seeing the connection between how a Latinx person navigates their world spatially in the US without also thinking about their sense of place in Latin America. In the case of Latinx street vendors in Los Angeles, they are bringing their sense of place, memories, culture, and ways of knowing and being in Latin America to this city and reshaping the urban landscape. So, for me, doing research in Latin America strengthens my research in the US with Latinx people.

We also have much to learn from critical Latin American and Caribbean scholars, and activists that are disrupting Eurocentric systems and advancing anti-colonial and feminist politics (see Cabnal 2010; Cusicanqui 2012; Espinosa-Miñoso, Lugones and Maldonado-Torres 2022). I say this mindful of how Latin American Studies and the Latin American academy more broadly were built on a white supremacist, imperialist and classist foundation (Lander 2000). Geography in Mexico, like geography in the US, still has a long way to go to recognize and uplift Black and Indigenous scholars. The more we can engage with each other and share ideas, I think the better we can understand the world we live in and how to build new, alternative worlds together. Latinx geographies helps us do that by being inherently transnational, hemispheric, and intersectional. It pushes us to not limit ourselves to political borders, because our communities certainly don't. We are continents of mobility, a people on the move.

**Madelaine:** I'm so happy you brought up this problem of how borders are reproduced within our fields of study. You also have me thinking about how the Global South is mired in racial hierarchies. While it's important to engage epistemologies, theories, and movements from the Global South we need to be careful to not assume they will be inherently anti-colonial or anti-racist. For example, at a critical geography conference a supposedly renowned radical white Mexican geographer outrightly said there was "no such thing as Black geographies" and that "race works differently in Latin America" and that "Black geographies is merely a US concept." Where to begin to unpack this profoundly anti-Black statement? This person was expressing their discontent with the US and Anglophone academy, but in the same breath negated the significant and longstanding presence of Black and Afro-descendant peoples in the Global North, Mexico, and Latin America. This is anti-Black epistemic violence that refuses to recognize the contributions of Afro-Mexican scholars, creatives, and activists like Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas (2004), Eduardo Añorve Zapara (2011), Itza Amanda Varela Huerta (2019), and geographers like Ulises Moreno-Tabarez (2020) who studies Afro-Indigenous politics and ecologies in the Costa Chica of Guerrero, Mexico. What this person said also outrightly denies the significant cultural and political work of organizations like MUAFTRO and Mexico Negro that have been forging an "Afro-centered critique of colonialism" in Mexico for decades (Moreno-Tabarez 2020, 26), and the vast body of work on Blackness in Latin America and the diaspora that I cannot adequately review here (see Costa Vargas 2008; Moreno Vega et al. 2012; Pelaez Lopez 2023).

**Lorena:** Yes, there is a need for greater attention to the specific experiences of Indigenous, Black, and Afro-descendant communities in Latin America. This is why it's important for us to have conversations across borders and across differences because we need to reckon with these tensions and come to more informed understandings and improve the living conditions of marginalized people north and south.

**Madelaine:** I agree, and this would be an important direction for Latinx geographies to go. A recent roundtable discussion by Zaragocin et al. (2022) proposes fostering dialogue across Latinx and Latin American critical geographies by considering how our shared histories of colonialism and imperialism have shaped our contemporary contexts as differently racialized people across the Americas, but not to conflate our experiences. They also point to the possibilities of bridging methods of decolonial feminist collectives across Abya Yala. This reminds me of the work intersectional feminist Latinx/Latin American activists have been doing in Tkaronto to organize free political education programs for community members

bringing together organizers, scholars, artists, and lessons from across Abya Yala and intentionally foregrounding Black, Indigenous, trans, and queer Latinx people (Cahuas 2023). I am excited about the possibilities this work is creating for future collaborations with decolonial feminist collectives throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Are there any conversations, topics, or directions in Latinx geographies that you find exciting?

**Lorena:** There are many things, but one thing I'm super excited about in Latinx geographies is queer cannabis studies. I think it's time to look at Latinx communities and their relationship with cannabis, particularly in states that have legalized it and where African American and Latinx communities have experienced mass incarceration. Robert Chlala's (2020) research is developing the field of cannabis studies by taking a deliberately queer approach and focusing on the experiences of Black, Latinx and other racialized people in Los Angeles who work in the cannabis industry. This is a multi-million-dollar industry and it's important for us to know the implications of this for racialized workers and how queer and trans people of color have been at the forefront of sustaining alternative cannabis economies and spaces of care.

**Madelaine:** I'm so glad you mentioned this, and I want to point out how Chlala (2020) draws on your theorization of a queer Chicana consciousness to approach his research. Magaly Ordoñez who is a graduate student I've been working closely with over the last few years at the University of Minnesota, also builds on your work and Chlala's to take a specifically queer Chicana feminist approach to cannabis studies, which will greatly contribute to the field. I must also mention Leigh-Anna Hidalgo (2022) who engages your work to develop a distinct Chicana/Latina feminist methodology to deepen understandings of Black and racialized Latinx street vendor struggles in Los Angeles, and the formation of abolitionist marketplaces. Clearly, your scholarship has influenced generations of Latinx Studies scholars and geographers and made it possible for us to approach geographical questions using queer Chicana/Latina feminisms and radically push the discipline forward.

### **Sembrando semillitas | Planting little seeds through intergenerational Chicana/Latina feminist geographer pláticas**

In this paper we have offered a plática between an early-career Latina feminist geographer (Madelaine) and mid-career queer Chicana feminist geographer (Lorena). This plática opened a space for sharing our academic journeys and how we have come to the growing subfield of Latinx geographies. For both of us, our distinct experiences with family, home, difference, witnessing injustice, and community organizing, have motivated us to pursue our respective research agendas. These experiences have also pushed us to create alternative approaches to geographical research that foreground queer Chicana/Latina feminist onto-epistemologies and methodologies. In this way we are forging new ways of thinking and doing geography that emerge from where we and the communities we are in conversation with know from. We also revisit Lorena's contributions, from her development of a queer Chicana consciousness and theorization of world-making, and Latinx geographies as a transnational, hemispheric and intersectional framework.

We chose a plática format instead of the traditional interview or academic paper because it allowed us to make visible our process of reciprocal and vulnerable exchange. Pláticas are not formulaic or extractive. You cannot ask questions you are not willing to answer. They are messy conversations grounded in mutual respect and care. They are full of storytelling, reflection, consejos (advice), chisme (gossip), emotion, encouragement, and



everyday dialogue. Pláticas allow us to speak and be heard and can even offer a sense of healing and empowerment to continue our paths. Revisiting our plática, I (Madelaine) can hear how my feelings of gratitude for Lorena spill over the page. Reading her work sparked my imagination about the possibilities of bridging Chicana/Latina feminisms and human geography and her generous guidance over the years has been crucial to my formation as a Latina feminist geographer.

In this way, our plática also shows how we build on the contributions of women of color scholars before us. It is significant that Lorena was advised by renowned Chicana geographer, Dr. Laura Pulido who for decades has been actively mentoring students of color across Ethnic Studies, American Studies, and human geography, developing connections across these fields and training future generations of critical interdisciplinary scholars. What is also notable is that most often this crucial work goes unnoticed or is undervalued in the academy, and yet has far-reaching implications. Through their innovative scholarship and committed mentoring praxis, Drs. Laura Pulido and Lorena Muñoz have created space in the discipline for Latinx geographers and Latinx geographies.

As Lorena articulated, her intention is to “plant little seeds of hope, knowledge and activism” with and for communities that “may expand into something I cannot fully anticipate in the future.” Following this intention, we offer our plática as a collection of little seeds or *semillitas* that can grow into something fruitful for Latinx students and geographers, as well as anyone pursuing research questions grounded in community relationships, and a commitment to social justice. Reflecting on our plática, we see two *semillitas* emerge: Lorena’s conceptualization of world-making and our theorizing of Latinx geographies as a transnational, hemispheric and intersectional framework. We come to planting these *semillitas* deeply influenced by where we know from, the communities we are in conversation with, the work of Latinx Studies scholars and Black, Indigenous, feminist, queer and anti-colonial geographies scholarship.

Lorena uses world-making to draw attention to the ways that differently marginalized people understand, inhabit, and create alternative life worlds comprised of complex relationships that extend beyond a particular place (Muñoz 2023b, 2018a, 2016a). In this way, world-making is attentive to differences without flattening them and makes connections across people, places and struggles for more just futures. World-making aligns with a Latinx geographies framework as they both refuse disciplinary boundaries and demand thinking relationally across borders and between northern and southern contexts. As Lorena says, “I could never stop seeing the connection between how a Latinx person navigates their world spatially in the US without also thinking about their sense of place in Latin America.” World-making and Latinx geographies also can help alert us to the ways that hierarchical systems of power like white supremacy, anti-Blackness and settler colonialism are reproduced throughout the Americas in scholarship and practice, even among self-proclaimed radical geographers or communities organizing for social change. Together world-making and Latinx geographies offer a language and interdisciplinary lens to deepen understandings of agency, resistance, and social transformation in and beyond geography.

Our plática also reveals a dialogue of *cariño* (care) and friendship that disrupts the status quo of how we relate to each other within the hierarchical and individualistic neoliberal academy. Building on Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship on pláticas and interventions by feminist geographers underscoring the importance of friendship, mentorship, dialogue, and

collective resistance through slow scholarship, we situate pláticas as an important method for reimagining our relationships with each other as academics (DasGupta et al. 2021; Manzi, Ojeda and Hawkins 2019; Webster and Boyd 2019; Mullings and Mukherjee 2018; Caretta et al. 2020; Kohl and McCutcheon 2015; Mountz et al. 2015). Pláticas require us to slow down, approach each other with care, curiosity, and respect, ask questions, actively listen, and meaningfully respond and offer support if needed. Pláticas create spaces where deeper relationship-building, understanding and friendship can emerge, which would greatly support the wellbeing of women of color and other underrepresented people in the academy. Indeed, taking time to have pláticas with each other over the last six years has strengthened our friendship and helped us navigate times of stress, hurt, uncertainty, and loss.

Writing our plática in a text format may be a limitation as you cannot hear our tone, pauses or laughter. Yet, as these moments between two Chicana/Latina geographers are still too rare, this plática is a semillita or starting point for how we may incorporate pláticas into our praxis and methodologies in geography. There is great potential for more pláticas that delve deeper into the experiences of Latinx and racialized students and early-career scholars, as well as pláticas around how we teach and mentor as faculty of color. Pláticas can also be used to facilitate *conocimiento* or better understanding of how we can approach and grow Latinx geographies. These efforts are significant as they demonstrate how sharing knowledge and building theory is an embodied, relational, and collective endeavor, and pushes against the neoliberal academy's culture of individualism and competition.

In response to likely questions of who can or should use pláticas, we follow Morales et al. (2023) and wish to pose more nuanced and reflexive questions as Delgado Bernal encourages her students to do. It would be important for one to consider what their personal and past relationship is to pláticas, as well as reflect on their collaborators' relationships to pláticas. It would also be important to ask oneself, "How deeply have I delved into the Chicana/Latina feminista literature? Why do I believe this might be an appropriate methodological approach? In what ways am I willing to be vulnerable in a plática and how might my vulnerabilities parallel or differ from my collaborators?" (Morales et al. 2023, 10). These questions emerge not because of gatekeeping, but a deep awareness of how the scholarship of Chicanas/Latinas and women of color more broadly has been discounted, coopted or only given superficial attention by citing catchphrases or dropping in the names of the few most visible scholars. Perhaps this discussion can further spark conversations in geography on how we can ethically engage with Chicana/Latina feminisms, women of color feminisms, Latinx geographies and other critical bodies of work without appropriating knowledge.

To conclude, we understand pláticas as a generative method for building relationships of support, care, and friendship, and for developing research and co-creating theories, especially in Latinx geographies. It is through our pláticas that we (the authors) have come to better understand why and how we do the work we do in our research, teaching, mentorship, and communities. Furthermore, our pláticas offered a space for learning and thinking more deeply about queer Chicana/Latina feminisms in geography, world-making and how it is connected to a Latinx geographies framework that we understand as transnational, hemispheric and intersectional. By sharing our plática here we made visible what has been largely invisible, which is how women of color geographers find and make something out of

the little semillitas planted by scholars before them, while planting more for those who follow. There are many ways that pláticas can be taken up and further expanded in Latinx geographies and geography more broadly, among scholars who have different experiences and positionalities than us. We cannot fully know where pláticas will take us, but we offer our semillitas in great anticipation of working towards more equitable and just geographies.

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