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Vázquez, David J.

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Triangulations

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Triangulations

Narrative Strategies for Navigating Latino Identity

David J. Vázquez



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Introduction

Notes on Triangulation

Navigating Latina/o Identity

> *What we [authors] do might be done in solitude and with great desperation, but it tends to produce exactly the opposite. It tends to produce community and in many people hope and joy.*
>
> —Junot Díaz, *Bostonist Interview*

> *Hegemony has so constructed the ideas of method and theory that often we cannot recognize anything that is different from what the dominant discourse constructs. As a consequence, we have to look in nontraditional places for our theories: in the prefaces to anthologies, in the interstices of autobiographies, in our cultural artifacts (the cuentos).*
>
> —Sonia Saldívar-Hull, *Feminism on the Border*

Triangulating Identity in the Latina/o First-Person Personal Narrative

In Piri Thomas's 1967 autobiography *Down These Mean Streets*, the protagonist cites a curious exchange he has with Brew, his African American comrade. As a dark-skinned Puerto Rican, Piri's phenotypic similarities with Brew would indicate a likely affiliation.[1] Yet a perplexing conflict arises, setting up a fascinating negotiation of the meaning of Piri's racial identity:

> I [Piri] looked at Brew, who was as black as God is supposed to be white. "Man, Brew," I said, "you sure an ugly spook."
>
> Brew smiled. "Dig this Negro calling out 'spook,'" he said.
>
> I smiled and said, "I'm a Porty Rican."
>
> "Ah only sees another Negro in fron' of me," said Brew.
>
> This was the "dozens," a game of insults . . . (121)

While the disturbing deployment of racial stereotypes and Piri's transparent attempt to preserve privilege through their deployment betray

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the narrator's uneasiness with black identity, Brew's hail of Piri as a fellow Negro and Piri's deployment of "the dozens" emphasize a strategic alignment of himself and his community with African Americans.[2] At the same time, Piri rejects these terms in his assertion that he is "Porty Rican," calling attention to his inability to identify with African Americans in the ways that Brew imagines (namely in terms of the one-drop rule of racial admixture). The corrupt "Porty Rican" subjectivity to which Piri clings is also lacking, as his experience as a colonized subject living in the United States alienates him from a comfortable national identification with the island.[3] Consequently, the Puerto Rican identity Piri narrates is both African American and Puerto Rican, but neither. By counterpoising the insufficiencies of both categories, Thomas attempts to navigate a position that might be more accurately termed "Nuyorican."

While this difference may seem academic, Thomas's narrative strategies attempt to posit a Nuyorican subjectivity that has important political implications for mainland Puerto Ricans. By strategically aligning himself with African Americans, he leverages oppositional traditions that emerge out of slavery, emancipation, the civil rights movement, and black nationalism. As a figure who shares phenotypic and cultural similarities with African Americans, it is logical that Thomas would use these aspects of his racial identity to contest white supremacy. At the same time, because of the history of colonization and racialization specific to Puerto Ricans on the mainland, Piri's uneasy alliance with African American identity demands reconfiguration within a colonial context. When viewed from these perspectives, Thomas's navigation between blackness and island-based Puerto Rican nationality constitutes an attempt to locate a Nuyorican subject that accounts for *all* aspects of his racial, class, and national identities.

Thomas's case is not isolated. In fact, many Latina/o authors of the late twentieth century employ similar narrative strategies in their first-person personal narratives—a continuum of literary forms that includes memoir, autobiography, *testimonio*, autobiographical fiction, and other forms of life writing. *Triangulations* examines these narrative strategies to comprehend how Latina/o authors use existing identity categories to navigate the troubled racial waters of the United States. One of this book's central premises is that Latina/o authors engage in these triangulations to contest liberal individualist notions of identity and their accompanying racial formations.

As the title of this book indicates, the navigational technique of triangulation offers a metaphor for understanding how Latina/o authors

negotiate complex identities. Mariners use mathematical triangulation to calculate physical positions and chart courses. Navigators relate an unknown position to the known location of two others by mapping an imaginary triangle. The triangle then yields coordinates for the unknown position based on the distance from and angle of the other two. It is critical that triangulation emphasizes the mathematical relationships between *all three* points of a triangle, since without all the constituent points, it is impossible to navigate. Triangulation is a dynamic technique that engages multiple way points, distances, and recalculations in the process of navigation.

While the operations employed by mariners are strictly mathematical, the relationships between two known identities (the meaning of black and white racial identities in the United States, for example) and an "unknown" one (the meaning of Puerto Rican, Chicana/o, or Latina/o subjectivities) are analogous to the processes that take place in navigational triangulation.[4] Consequently, many of the Latina/o first-person personal narrativists included in this study locate their own subject positions through an analogous triangulation of identity—often in terms of serial and progressive negation (not "this," not "that," but something other). As the example from *Down These Mean Streets* that opens this book demonstrates, the triangulations that Latina/o authors employ often contrast the complexity of their own subject positions with static conceptions of identity operative in mainstream culture.

Another aspect of my understanding of Latina/o triangulation emerges from the field of semiotics. Along with Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Morris, Charles Sanders Peirce was a founder of semiotic theory. Where Saussure and Morris focus on general theories of sign relations, Peirce's notion of the triad deals specifically with representing relations. For Peirce, representing relations occur within a tripartite process: a "thing" (the object) is represented by another thing (the representamen) to a third thing (the interpretant). The thing (or object) is signified by the representamen so that the interpretant is subsequently determined to be another representamen of the object to another interpretant. That is, the interpretant stands in relation to the original object such that it represents it to another interpretant. The sign's sense is thus conveyed by translating meaning from one interpretant to another.

This focus on representing relations facilitates a concern with social factors in signifying processes. As a result, meaning arises out of the

relation between a thing, a symbol, and an interpretant in the signifying process. Peirce stresses the irreducibility of the triadic nature of the sign by arguing that each component gets its sense *only* through its interrelation with the other components. Any relations that are reducible to a chain of dyadic causes and effects are not true signs. Moreover, since the sign's power to represent rests equally on each component, meaning is not "fixed" within a static position. The process of translation from one interpretant to another links semiotic relations in what might be conceived as a network of signs. Peirce argues that meaning also arises out of the dynamism *between* the constituent components, as well as the sign's relation with other signs. The process of translating meaning from one sign to another is thus at the heart of the signification process.

While this book is not based on semiotic analysis, Peirce's theory of the triad informs my understanding of Latina/o triangulations. Rather than understanding identity as fixed, I show how the self that is revealed in Latina/o first-person personal narratives emerges from relations *between* the insufficiencies of traditional identity categories. These authors attempt to navigate identity in the movement between the three points. *Triangulations* maps processes through which Latina/o subjectivity emerges in these texts from the excess of binary (self and other for example) identity positions in the United States.

The representations I consider also engage other aspects of history and culture to create an alternative concept of the self. As the quote from Thomas's autobiography that opens this introduction indicates, we cannot ignore the fact that Piri's presence in the United States is determined in part by the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. Policies like Operation Bootstrap, the projects of Puerto Rican nationalists like Pedro Albizu-Campos, as well as the burgeoning Puerto Rican movement taking place during the period when Thomas wrote *Down These Mean Streets* in the mid-1960s, are part of the historical and cultural backdrop of the scene.[5] Unlike other hermeneutic modes that obscure these underpinnings, reading Thomas's triangulations allows us to focus on how these resonances inform his narrative strategies.

Flowing from these observations, *Triangulations* is motivated by a series of basic questions: Why do many late twentieth-century Latina/o authors use first-person personal narratives? Why does this historical period and its attendant racial ideologies require and produce first-person personal narratives? Finally, what does the first-person personal narrative

illuminate or occlude? Ranging from the memoirs of Ernesto Galarza and Jesús Colón to the autobiographical fiction of Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, John Rechy, and Judith Ortiz Cofer to the historical fiction interlaced with memory and autobiography of contemporary authors like Julia Alvarez, Latina/os continue to write first-person personal narratives.[6]

In noting these dynamics it is important not to conflate the differences between texts produced during the insurgent nationalist period of the 1960s and 1970s and those written during the 1980s and beyond. Indeed, texts produced during the last two decades of the twentieth century are often oriented around a different set of cultural, social, and historical imperatives. Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez (2005) describe differences between the literature of the 1960s and what they call "post-sixties literature" (2)—texts marked by both market success and mainstream literary acceptance. Their work evidences a desire to quantify Latina/o literature at a "crossroads," a "moment of consolidation and institutionalization for a field that has historically thought of itself as marginal and oppositional" (1). Dalleo and Machado Sáez further argue that 1960s writers are often depicted as "progressive and confrontational because of their rejection of the market and alignment with the ghetto, while the newer writers are seen as apolitical or even conservative" (2) due in part to their market success. They attempt to recuperate postsixties Latina/o literature by pointing out that "recent Latino/a literature imagines creative ways to rethink the relationship between a politics of social justice and market popularity—a combination that the critical reception denies by either rejecting one of these elements or articulating them as binary opposites" (3).

I concur with Dalleo and Machado Sáez by arguing that postsixties Latina/o literature is often motivated by political perspectives that creatively rearticulate 1960s oppositional paradigms. Rather than uncritically embracing the literary and political concerns of the insurgent nationalist period, authors like Julia Alvarez, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Sandra Cisneros reconfigure their opposition to complicate—and at times exceed—1960s politics. This is not to uncritically embrace postsixties texts. As Dalleo and Machado Sáez acknowledge, and critics like Lisa Sánchez González (2001) more forcefully point out, postsixties texts often reinscribe hegemonic values—often in terms of class bias or "tales of upward mobility" (Dalleo and Machado Sáez, 2).[7] My position is that critics who categorically problematize postsixties texts miss some of the larger political dynamics these books encounter. While they are still influenced by and evidence

the residue of the insurgent nationalist period, postsixties texts attempt to constitute opposition in the contradictory space of contemporary U.S. culture—and in particular the highly contested realm of global capital.

Moreover, where Dalleo and Machado Sáez focus primarily on establishing a contemporary canon of Latina/o literature that includes postsixties texts, my analysis centers on how these first-person personal narratives constitute identity within the shifting waters of late twentieth-century U.S. society. Accordingly, this book explores form and content as related social and political phenomena. It is my contention that the first-person personal narrative forms employed by the authors I examine are intimately connected with projects of community efficacy. They represent the self as inextricably linked with larger social structures like community and national identity.

Narrating a Matrixed Subject

Reading Latina/o autobiographies as polyvocal and socially embedded reveals a rich continuum of narrative techniques that offer multilevel critiques of individual subjectivity, community formation, and national belonging. While the idea of socially embedded autobiographical writing is not new, I argue that the authors included in this study use their first-person personal narratives to imagine completely different spaces of belonging. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001) observe in relation to postcolonial autobiographies, aggrieved subjects often use their life narratives to explore "the decolonization of subjectivity forged in the aftermath of colonial oppression" (10). In particular, Smith and Watson note that such aggrieved subjects often represent the self as distinct from the autonomous individual typically represented in the genre of autobiography. Similarly, Susan Stanford Friedman (1998) points out that "the emphasis on individualism as the necessary precondition for autobiography" advocated by critics like Georges Gusdorf and James Olney "is thus a reflection of privilege, one that excludes from the canons of autobiography those writers who have been denied by history the illusion of individualism" (75). Stanford Friedman further asserts that "instead of seeing themselves as solely unique, women often explore their sense of shared identity with other women, an aspect of identity that exists in tension with a sense of their own uniqueness" (79). While Smith and Watson and Stanford Friedman engage women's autobiography as a distinct

literary formation, I extend their arguments to my analysis because I see similar dynamics in Latina/o first-person personal narratives. Rather than representing themselves as striving for freedom from obligation to others in their communities, the interdependent representations included in this study suggest mutually dependent subjectivities that challenge doctrines of liberal individualism basic to U.S. self-imagining.

Since the first-person personal narratives this book explores emerge out of polylateral dialogues, part of what they narrate are the social relations envisioned by their authors' communities. Yet as George Lipsitz reminds us, "people cannot enact new social relations unless they can envision them. But they cannot envision new social relations credibly unless they are enacted in embryonic form in their own lives. Often cultural creation bridges these needs" (2001, 182). By understanding the triangulations they construct, it is possible to comprehend how books like Jesús Colón's *A Puerto Rican in New York*, Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun*, and Julia Alvarez's *¡Yo!* create imaginative spaces where new social relations are envisioned and discursively enacted.

Unlike many canonical autobiographers like Benjamin Franklin or Henry Adams, most of the authors *Triangulations* considers turn to first-person personal narrative forms in their first books rather than after a lifetime of achievement.[8] Significantly, these authors continue to deploy first-person personal narratives, even to the exclusion of other genres. Instead of passively reporting on events in their lives, they actively shape imaginative spaces of communal belonging. As Lourdes Torres (1991) suggests in relation to Latina autobiographers, these authors often "create a new discourse which seeks to incorporate the often contradictory aspects of their gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and feminist politics. The radicalness of their project lies in the authors' refusal to accept any one position; rather, they work to acknowledge the contradictions in their lives and to transform difference into a source of power" (278).

While Torres confines her comments to texts by Latinas like Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales, I expand her analysis to Latina/os more generally. I argue that Latina/o first-person personal narratives operate on a different register than mainstream narratives of the self. By representing their selves as a function of the tension between the communal and the uniqueness of the individual, the first-person personal narrativists I examine contest the myth of autonomous individualism.

Indeed, Latina/o authors frequently use the personal narrative to mark their estrangement from hegemonic (i.e., white, male, heterosexual) subjectivity. Pointing to the ways women, ethnic and racial minorities, and postcolonial authors use life-writing genres to contest liberal individualism, Linda Anderson (2001) explains that older autobiographical traditions offer "mystificatory rhetoric obscuring the ideological underpinnings of its particular version of 'selfhood'" (4). Rather than conforming to the bourgeois subject enunciated by authors like Franklin, Adams, or Ralph Waldo Emerson, Anderson asserts that women and other aggrieved subjects use life-writing genres to highlight their exclusion from white male identity. In a similar vein this book argues that many Latina/o first-person personal narratives highlight their separation from hegemonic norms by narrating a matrixed subject.

Latina/o authors matrix their lives by representing the "I" collectively, situating individual subjectivity within the multiplicity of experiences in the autobiographer's community. Writing of the traumatic disruptions to the lives of Mexican Americans and Californios after the Treaty of Guadalupe–Hidalgo in 1848, Genaro Padilla (1993) notes that when faced with the threat of historical or physical "erasure," autobiography becomes a dominant mode of discursive resistance.[9] Padilla's suggestion aids in understanding that personal narratives often engage in "a communal utterance, a collective tale, rather than merely an individual's autobiography" (8). The collective "I" substitutes for a singular narrative identity, registering resistance at the level of history and cultural remembrance.

Katherine Gatto (2000) similarly argues that Latina writers often use autobiographical forms to register collective identities. Gatto contests the idea of the atomized individual by arguing that "her [Latina's'] fictions, not always rendered through the first-person 'I' but many times through a community of women [. . .] are nevertheless the stories of her life, the interval between birth and death" (85). While Gatto essentializes Latina identity by asserting a universal subjectivity, her point resonates with Padilla's by suggesting that Latina texts frequently operate on a collective rather than individual level.

I build on Padilla's historical work and Gatto's theorization of Latina autobiography by suggesting that twentieth-century Latina/o first-person personal narratives function as culturally matrixed portals. By representing the "I" in relation to community, the authors I examine write both as individuals and as members of aggrieved groups. By representing

community politics through the autobiographical "I," they both engage and reject dynamics that govern how individuals relate with their communities. Consequently, I examine the impulses these texts evidence toward the social, taking care to note the tensions many of them represent between individuality and community empowerment.

Implicit in these impulses toward the social is a desire for political empowerment for the author and his or her community. The "I" potentially serves as a portal to new, resistant political coalitions. Over three-quarters of a century ago, Antonio Gramsci (1985) suggested that the value in autobiography lies in its ability to depict exceptional identities. These identities are exceptional because of their capacity to produce large-scale political changes. Gramsci's notion of political autobiography links the representation of an exceptional self with collective social action: "Autobiography can be conceived 'politically.' One knows that one's life is similar to that of a thousand others, but through 'chance' it has had opportunities that the thousand others in reality could not or did not have. By narrating it, one creates this possibility, suggests the process, indicates the opening. Autobiography therefore replaces the 'political' or 'philosophical essay': it describes in action what otherwise is deduced logically. Autobiography certainly has a great historical value in that it shows life in action and not just as written laws or dominant moral principles say it should be" (132).

While the narrative focus of autobiography lies in the enunciation of a nonstandard life, the ideological force of Gramsci's claim emerges in relation to larger communal structures. Although the autobiographer's life is similar to his or her fellows', it is only "chance" that separates the author from the "thousand others" (132). Gramsci thereby links the representation of an individual life with people who might be described as "fellow travelers" (Saldívar 1990, 164–65). This claim suggests that subjectivity in political autobiographies is intrinsically linked with social structures.

Gramsci's concept of political autobiography emphasizes the connection between the representation of an individual life and the politics of the community to stake an ethical claim. Since only chance separates the individual from his or her fellows, autobiographers have a moral obligation to narrate exceptional identities. By narrating their lives, autobiographers "suggests a process"—a process that presumably leads to the politicization of the community. Part of the function of political autobiography is to invite readers to use the text as a road map to exceptional identities. Gramsci's theory thus proposes that new forms of political affiliation

emerge in relation to discursive articulations of individual subjectivity (hence his assertion that autobiography replaces "political" or "philosophical" essays). According to this perspective, autobiography offers an entry point through which others can join the author in new, politicized communities. Yet by envisioning a coalition of progressive political actors, autobiographies also offer imaginative communal spaces that facilitate a rethinking of social relations. The autobiographical text, then, offers the potential to mobilize communities that disrupt dominant notions of citizenship and subjectivity.

There is, however, a third aspect to Gramsci's theory. Because it describes "life in action" (he repeats the phrase twice in a rather economical passage), the autobiographical project also depicts a life *of* action. Doris Sommer (2004) reminds us that when faced with the lack of an appropriate historical juncture for a workers' movement in Italy, Gramsci turned to culture to activate revolutionary potential (104–8).[10] Sommer's suggestion is helpful for situating how Latina/o authors use autobiography as a platform from which to mobilize opposition. By turning to culture to activate their modes of political expression, Latina/o first-person personal narrativists provide contemporary analogues to Gramsci's Italian workers.

Gramsci's theory of political autobiography is useful for my readings of Latina/o triangulation because it apprehends antihegemonic narratives of the self as inextricably related to the communal. In particular, Gramsci's notion of a narrative subject who discursively enacts an alternative politics is helpful in thinking about how contemporary Latina/o authors position themselves as potential models for antiracist, antihegemonic action. I extend Gramsci's analysis by foregrounding how twentieth-century Latina/o first-person personal narratives affirm communal subjectivities and alternative notions of national belonging. Where Gramsci points to a collective social function for autobiographies, the portal through which others pass is still oriented around the individual. My understanding of Latina/o triangulation, on the other hand, focuses on how these authors use narrative strategies that *simultaneously* represent individual subjects in relation to dynamic structures of community and national identity. While the self is the unit of analysis Latina/o authors employ, these selves are inextricably bound with structures of community that elaborate complex forms of collective identity. These collective identities are navigated within the space of the nation, necessitating the assertion of alternative forms of communal and social belonging. Triangulation therefore offers

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a metaphor for understanding how Latina/o first-person personal narratives offer matrixed, communal subjects.

Additionally, if a primary function of autobiography is the representation of a life of action capable of mobilizing political coalitions, one way to understand Gramsci's theory in relation to my readings is to consider how contemporary Latina/o first-person personal narratives respond to similar cultural and historical circumstances. Since the very notion of Latina/o identity relies on a synthetic (in terms of both artifice and fusion) political subjectivity, it is important to reflect on how authors envision these voluntary affiliations. *Triangulations* argues that first-person personal narratives provide important sites for visualizing these processes. Authors like Ernesto Galarza, John Rechy, and Judith Ortiz Cofer represent themselves in relation to a life of action that engages various aspects of community efficacy.

Another life-writing genre that documents aspects of collective identity is the Latin American *testimonio*. Commentators like John Beverly (1993, 2004), Elzbieta Sklodowska (1996), and Doris Sommer (1996), characterize the *testimonio* as a "literature of fact" (Beverly 1993, 71) that is always collaborative and oriented around the representation of a social history, and of a particular cause to which the author(s) is trying to recruit the reader. The *testimonio* is also characterized by the presence of an interlocutor who mediates the narrative, often as it is told to him or her. The classic example of the *testimonio* is the narrative collaboration between Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, but there are many examples of the genre that arise from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.[11]

As Beverly and others have suggested, the social is an essential aspect of the *testimonio*. These social aspects include the relationship between the author and interlocutor, as well as the communal history integrated with the narrator's personal story. The work of authors like Jesús Colón, John Rechy, and Julia Alvarez resonate with these aspects of *testimonio*, as the "I" frequently operates as the key to cultural and historical understanding. Colón is particularly interesting in this regard, as his narrator operates as the central interlocutor for the stories in *A Puerto Rican in New York*.[12] By positioning his work as a story designed to combat the popular image of Puerto Ricans as deficient, Colón's book also conforms to two other aspects of the *testimonio*: (1) the narrative addresses the repression of Puerto Ricans on the mainland, and (2) this account provides a more

accurate version of the author's life and the history of his community. In so doing, Colón invokes his community by suggesting that many Puerto Ricans living in New York during the period lived lives that shared material and intellectual similarities with his own.

While *A Puerto Rican in New York* and many of the other books *Triangulations* considers share important similarities with classical *testimonios*, it is not accurate to characterize these works strictly as *testimonios*. As Beverly (1993) notes, one of the defining characteristics of the *testimonio* is its relationship with armed struggle. While authors like Colón, Thomas, Acosta, and Rechy espouse militant positions, it would be incorrect to consider their social and literary formations within the framework of armed struggle. From a purely formalist standpoint, their ability to represent themselves, rather than interacting with a collaborator or interlocutor, would also tend to disqualify these works from the *testimonio* tradition.

While *testimonios* and political autobiographies both aim to transform the reader through a new social awareness, the intent and potential outcomes of each genre differ sharply. In the case of *testimonios*, the writer and interlocutor attempt to raise consciousness about a social issue or struggle to enlist the reader as a potential ally and supporter. The *testimonio* addresses this change by questioning the social world of the reader (Beverly 1993, 84). Political autobiography, on the other hand, assumes continuity between reader and author, emphasizing key similarities between their social situations. In the strictest sense, political autobiography requires no interlocutor. Where *testimonio* attempts to give voice to the subaltern who cannot speak, political autobiography assumes a speaking subject who has access to both literary representation and a reading audience.

My comments are not designed to undermine the traditions of *testimonio* or political autobiography. Instead, I argue that Latina/o first-person personal narratives operate on a continuum of life writing that includes political autobiography and *testimonio*. The first-person personal narratives this book considers constitute hybrid forms that represent individual subjectivity in relation to projects of community efficacy. *Triangulations* suggests that Latina/os often reconfigure life-writing genres to more adequately represent the complexity of their lived experiences.

At the same time, *Triangulations* pays careful attention to the deployment of genre as a narrative strategy. This approach allows me to consider a range of genres including autobiography, memoir, autoethnography,

testimonio, and autobiographical fiction. By emphasizing the critical practice as a polylateral engagement with the text, my methodology explodes older interpretive models that characterize narratives of the self as merely personal revelation, private insight, or subjective truth that ranks below nonfiction, critical essays, or even "high" literary genres like the historical novel. This book attempts to provide a perspective from which we can glimpse the aesthetic choices, politics, and social dynamics embedded in Latina/o autobiographical texts.

Consequently, *Triangulations* considers the text from the standpoint of both object *and* process. This is in part an attempt to deal with the long and conflicting critical history of "what counts" as a narrative of the self. Some critics of autobiography, like Philippe Lejeune (1989), argue that the genre is a function of the author's intent. Others, like Paul de Man (1979) suggest that autobiography is not a genre but a figure of reading and understanding that operates over a range of texts. My understanding of first-person personal narrative flows from de Man's argument about autobiography. This book suggests that narratives of the self are constituted as much by a critical practice as by characteristics of a specific genre. Yet where de Man considers the autobiography a purely discursive formulation, I argue that Latina/o first-person personal narratives also function as articulations of social values.

It is not the case that every twentieth-century Latina/o first-person personal narrative engages with progressive political communities. As authors like Richard Rodríguez (1982, 2002), Linda Chávez (1991), and others demonstrate, many Latina/o authors align themselves with doctrines of assimilation and liberal individualism. While Rodríguez's and Chávez's texts are no less "political," this book focuses on first-person personal narratives that discursively contest white supremacy as part of their project of community efficacy. Rather than asserting individuality as the goal of self-representation—as Rodríguez and Chávez do—the authors included in this study affirm the communal as a basic aspect of discursive resistance. Although most of the texts I analyze embody a tension between individual empowerment and communal affirmation, their articulations of the self tend to reject liberal individualism and its attendant racial formations.

Triangulations further suggests that narrative strategies employed by Latina/o authors are intentional and conscious attempts to disrupt racial and ethnic binaries. As philosopher Charles Mills (1997) reminds

us, liberal individualism and white supremacy constitute structured and organized methods of securing privilege for whites at the expense of people of color. Viewed from this perspective, works by authors like Jesús Colón, Julia Alvarez, and Piri Thomas constitute refusals of white supremacy. These authors counter the insufficiencies of hegemonic notions of the subject in order to argue against what critical race theory scholar Leslie Espinoza (1998) calls "dichotomous categorical identity" (17). Dichotomous categorical identity is characterized by the enforcement of either/or binaries such as black/white, gay/straight, male/female, and so on. Under the terms of dichotomous categorical identity, one must choose a single aspect of identity to the exclusion of another. One is therefore black *or* white, gay *or* straight, male *or* female (17). Under dichotomous categorical identity, intersecting aspects of identity (gay, working-class Chicano, for instance) are illegible.

As the authors of the first-person personal narratives this book considers argue, binary identifications are incommensurate with the complexity of Latina/os' daily lives. As individuals and groups who exist on the margins of multiple racial, ethnic, and cultural categories, the Latina/o authors included in this study employ matrixed representations that refuse binary categories endemic to hegemonic culture.[13] In addition, rather than seeing these narrative strategies hierarchically by centering male perspectives, this book foregrounds how authors conceive of gender and sexuality to comprehend how Latina/o subjectivities evolve as complex and multifaceted phenomena.

Generative Contradictions

Although the relationships implicit in triangulation presuppose a conception of relatedness, I do not suggest that contradictions are absent from these texts. Indeed, contradictions are often the most interesting relations present in the works included in this book. It is therefore crucial to consider how contradictions serve as flashpoints and can ground other kinds of relations. For example, as scholars like Angie Chabram-Dernersesian (1992) and the Latina Feminist Group (2001) note, the misogyny of Latina/o cultural nationalist movements in the 1960s and early 1970s helped to spur the development of Chicana and Latina feminisms in the postsixties period. While these feminist movements were not facilitated or legitimated by groups like the Brown Berets or the Young Lords, Latinas'

experiences of gender oppression within cultural nationalist movements constituted a relation that helped to galvanize various feminist positions.[14]

Part of the difficulty with systems of racialization is that an autonomous space outside of these ideologies is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine. Here I invoke Louis Althusser's (2001) famous theory of ideology by pointing out that nothing exists outside of ideology. While this book de-emphasizes the notion of pure, transcendent alternatives to racial ideologies, it considers the representation of the self in these texts as symptomatic of a *desire*, however incomplete, to disrupt hegemonic culture. I advocate understanding these authors and texts from the standpoint of what José Muñoz (1999) describes as "ideological contradictory elements" (12), or what we might understand as generative contradictions.

Generative contradictions disrupt ideology by interrupting the flow of power. Because they do not fit comfortably within systemic (and therefore ideological) processes, generative contradictions momentarily interrupt ideologies and clear spaces for alternative modes of being. They allow for the "reworking of those energies that do not elide the 'harmful' or contradictory components of any identity" (12). As such, generative contradictions function as aspects of oppositional practices that cannot be quantified within the logic of constituent premises. While they may be incomplete or ephemeral, these moments of interruption allow the objects of ideology perspectives that temporarily disrupt processes of racialization.

The texts I examine frequently manifest generative contradictions in their desire to oppose hegemonic culture, while reinscribing many of the ingrained racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies they aim to subvert. Among the difficulties in reading books like Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* or Rechy's *The Sexual Outlaw* is that they don't offer transcendent subject positions. Sites like Acosta's formulation of the *vato loco* (crazy guy) or Rechy's conception of the sexual outlaw invest individual representations with public and communal aspirations.[15] In the course of using an individual form to express a collective experience, these authors link their literary personas with their imagined communities. They therefore create characters who offer momentary disruptions in ideology. Yet in writing such vexed characters, it becomes possible for these authors to deceive themselves, leading to the paradoxical reinscription of dominant hierarchies.

In addition, these authors—in fact all of the authors included in this study—use first-person personal narrative forms to express group identity

and to valorize alternative imagined communities, evidencing a tension between the political desire to express group solidarity and the need for individual empowerment. Although the texts I consider counter the liberal individualism represented in canonical autobiographies, they are still informed by it and draw on the same set of literary conventions.

Discordant moments like these either cannot be quantified by my approach or complicate my conception of triangulation. For example, in chapter 2 I argue that Thomas and Acosta represent their selves as aligned with their imagined national communities. Yet while both authors engage their communities as an aspect of the self, they also assert individuality in opposition to such communal identities. These desires for individual empowerment are in part premised on alienation *from* each author's respective community of origin. Thomas's and Acosta's use of individualism contradicts my reading strategy, but it also exposes another dynamic for social empowerment. Since racialization operates on both individual and group levels, many of these authors employ multiple narrative strategies to disrupt their own marginalization and that of their groups.

These are not abstract aesthetic issues in Latina/o first-person personal narratives. Rather, they are narrative strategies that emerge from concrete historical and social circumstances. For Acosta and Rechy, the *vato loco* and sexual outlaw have to be read in light of the individualization and criminalization of poverty and political resistance, as products of brutal police repression, class exploitation, homophobia, and the radical divisiveness inherent in the lives of people of color. In the face of systemic dehumanization, it isn't easy to discern what radical rehumanization might require. This book strives to understand these texts as vexed cultural sites that evidence a desire to disrupt hegemony by reclaiming humanity for these authors—and by extension their communities.

As Stuart Hall (1996) asserts, there are no neat distinctions between hegemonic and resistant cultures. We must therefore consider both direct articulations of resistance *and* the material circumstances of opposition to understand the intricate ways that Latina/o first-person personal narrativists attempt to subvert hegemony, while continuing to embody aspects of its problematics. Rather than romanticizing how these authors imagine their communities as patriarchal or essentialist, this book provides a candid analysis that considers how generative contradictions constitute an important disruption to hegemonic culture. As a result, I examine the *impulses* in these texts rather than their results.

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My analysis in *Triangulations* is thus characterized by both/and rather than either/or relations. In part, this book explores how Latina/o first-person personal narrativists use generative contradictions to contest dichotomous categorical identity. As Gloria Anzaldúa describes, "Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind in being 'worked' on. I have the sense that certain 'faculties'—not just in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored—and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened" (2007, preface).

Triangulations argues that the shifting, conflicting identities to which Anzaldúa alludes offer alternatives to dichotomous categorical notions of the self in the United States. I examine how these texts attempt to map alternative subject positions by documenting experiences that are illegible within systems of dichotomous categorical identity.

Self, Community, Nation: The Aporias of Cultural Nationalism

A secondary aspect of *Triangulations* encounters the vexed history of cultural nationalism.[16] Perhaps not surprisingly, given the prevalence of the political form during the late twentieth century, authors like Thomas, Acosta, Colón, Galarza, Rechy, Ortiz Cofer, and Alvarez often engage cultural nationalism (if only negatively) in their writings. This book complicates the tendency in both mainstream criticism and area studies to write off cultural nationalism. As scholars and writers ranging from Eric Hobsbawm (1992) to Anzaldúa have noted, nationalism is often a problematic political and social phenomenon.[17] Sonia Saldívar-Hull, for example, writes of the "dissatisfaction that so many activist *mujeres* began to feel in the face of the masculinist notions of [the Chicano movement]" (2000, 12). Carl Gutiérrez-Jones also warns against the "utopian promise held out by the Chicano movement . . . [that] fueled a problematic collapsing of differences among Chicanos in an effort to formulate an overriding concept of *the* community" (1995, 101–2). Similarly, Chela Sandoval (2000) argues that insurgent nationalist movements have been historically unsuccessful because in their attempts to assert the validity of Latina/o identities, they became mired in identity politics and assertions of supremacy, diverting potentially liberatory impulses into hierarchies like patriarchy, essentialism, and authoritarianism.

I agree with these characterizations of nationalism as an imperfect political and social formation. Yet while some portray nationalism as irredeemably flawed, *Triangulations* suggests that these points of view overlook dynamics that explain much about how individuals and social groups conceive of opposition. Shalini Puri (2004) makes the case in a Caribbean context that the presumed demise of the nation in the face of transnationalism and globalization is premature. She argues that "differentiating amongst different nationalisms" does not necessarily represent a desire to "reinstall the nation-state or nationalism as privileged categories of cultural analysis" (6). Rather, Puri argues that transnationalism is "poorly served by denying the continuing, though discernibly declining, power of the nation-state" (6). For her, the nation offers an indispensible mode of empowerment for postcolonial and other marginalized subjects. Rather than decrying the nation or declaring its power dead, I agree with Puri in asserting that the nation continues to exert influence in the postsixties period. Accordingly, this book seeks a more nuanced critical history of the growth and transformation of cultural nationalist politics as they manifest in Latina/o first-person personal narratives.

Reconsidering insurgent nationalism also facilitates a more complete historical, cultural, and social understanding of the development of oppositional consciousness in Latina/o communities. Because the nation mediates (in part) how we experience our identities, it is possible to understand the necessity of asserting national consciousness in first-person personal narratives. As Puri further notes, the nation serves as an indispensible category for combating the homogenizing forces of globalization and discourses of celebratory hybridity: "Caribbean discourses . . . undo the generalized claim that hybridity and the nation-state are opposed to one another and enable a broader questioning of invocations of a 'global village' and the death of the nation-state" (6). Puri makes a useful distinction between transnationalisms, which are devoted to aspects of human societies that cannot be contained within the boundaries of a singular nation-state, and "postnationalism," which effectively argues that the nation as a political and analytical category is dead. I agree with Puri's argument that those who celebrate the triumph of the global and transnational by declaring the death of the nation overlook the important ways disempowered communities invoke the nation (as an imagined community, rather than a nation-state) as a strategy for empowerment. While this might be a risky move at a time when many theoretical currents within

Latina/o studies are oriented around the transnational, I concur with Puri that reexamining cultural nationalism through current critical and theoretical tools facilitates a better understanding of cultural nationalism as a force that was and may still be productive for aggrieved communities of color in their searches for social justice.[18]

While Puri's observations relate to the complex cultural and historical milieu of the Caribbean, I extend her analysis to U.S. Latina/os for several reasons. First—and perhaps most obviously—the history and culture of Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans in the United States is rooted in the Caribbean. Further, as Juan Flores (2009) has recently pointed out, social and regional belonging in Caribbean, Latin American, and other diasporic communities in the United States is more accurately characterized by streams and counterstreams of migration and return rather than by discrete movements of people from the home space to the United States. Perhaps most important for my interests, Latina/os continue to deploy nationalism as a strategy for political empowerment, even in the wake of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the forces of globalization that shape migration, immigration, and the flow of transnational capital. *Triangulations* thus pays careful attention to how the *rhetoric* of insurgent nationalism continues to influence how opposition is conceived during the last third of the twentieth century.

It is important to note that this study is not an attempt to recuperate Chicano, Puerto Rican, or other (male) Latino insurgent projects. On the contrary, I follow the lead of Latina feminists like Anzaldúa (2007), Chela Sandoval (2000), Asunción Horno-Delgado et al. (1989), Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman (1997), Norma Alarcón (1999), Paula Moya (2002), and Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2007), as well as queer studies scholars like José Muñoz (1999), Juana María Rodríguez (2003), and Roderick Ferguson (2004), who point to a major shortcoming of insurgent nationalism: the consistent reinscription of patriarchy and heteronormativity. Instead, this book attempts to understand the larger literary, historiographic, and social dynamics that contribute to insurgent nationalism as an important mode of oppositional consciousness. *Triangulations* suggests that what appears to contemporary readers as simply retrograde historically served as an *attempt* to combat white supremacy, while also validating the author's community and culture.

By considering these first-person personal narratives from the standpoint of their triangulations, it becomes possible to comprehend how

the residue of cultural nationalism continues to reflect and transform how Latina/os imagine themselves and their relationships with others (both within and outside of their communities). This book grapples with both the prevalence of this residue and the transformations to nationalist discourse that Latina/os undertake to destabilize racist conceptions of identity in the United States. When viewed from this more complex perspective, we can see how authors like John Rechy, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and Julia Alvarez take up and transform the residue of insurgent nationalism.

What interests me, and what I hope will interest scholars in Chicana/o studies, Puerto Rican studies, Latina/o studies, comparative ethnic studies, and the humanities and social sciences more generally, is how these texts represent what Chela Sandoval calls a network of mobile resistance strategies. These networks include a range of narrative techniques that encompass discursive, physical, and epistemological opposition. By conceiving of opposition as relational, it becomes feasible to understand how authors triangulate their resistance to white supremacy—both in terms of and in excess of the nation. They evidence what Walter Mignolo (2000, 67) has described as "an other thinking"—a form of epistemological practice that constitutes a radical break with Eurocentricism. While it is not my claim that these authors or texts embody a transcendent break from Eurocentrism, *Triangulations* focuses on how these authors and texts evidence impulses toward an other thinking.

Latina/o Identity: Synthesizing Political Coalitions

Implicit in the previous claims is that there actually are commonalities between various Latina/o communities. Latina/o studies scholars have long pointed out that, by virtue of our various histories, languages, and circumstances of arrival to (or in the case of Chicana/os and Puerto Ricans, long-term presence in) the United States, there is no single line of Latina/o ethnicity. Earl Shorris (1992), for example, advocates that the various communities that compose a larger Hispanic or Latina/o identity are better characterized as independent ethnic groups.[19] Others, like Arlene Dávila (2001), point out that the commodification of Latina/o identity obscures the racialization of various groups with roots in Latin America. Still others, like Suzanne Oboler (1995), Juan Flores (1997), Frances Aparicio (1999), and Juan González (2000), suggest that while there is no

organic connection between Latina/o groups, there is political utility in self-identifying under a collective rubric.

As astute readers have probably noticed, I use the words Latina and Latino to denote a voluntary, interethnic identity in the United States. I am interested in a disciplinary framework that encounters the diversity of Latina/o representations without losing the specificity of each group's particular relationship to power. As Frances Aparicio asks about the links between pan-Latina/o identity and Latina/o studies, "how do we reconceptualize our Chicano Studies, Puerto Rican Studies, and Latino Studies programs as sites where diverse national groups and identities are respected while forging a larger, inter-Latino space from which to produce knowledge and interact socially, culturally and politically?" (1999, 16). As a partial answer to Aparicio's question, I advocate pan-Latina/o identity as a liberatory political coalition for two reasons. First, as a voluntary association, Latina/o identity has the potential to serve as an alliance capable of unifying disparate groups for common political purposes. Second, the interethnic coalition Latina/o helps us to see how power operates on a range of racialized populations. By comparing the experiences of a Cuban American woman in Miami, Florida, with a Chicano in the West, for example, it becomes possible to understand how racialization operates across a broad spectrum of geographical, social, and political contexts.

By comparing authors and texts, this book traces the common political, social, cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic strands that travel among and between various Latina/o communities. In particular, I examine both the failures of nationalism to record the interethnic alliances that fueled many social movements (the leadership of Dominican Federíco Lora in the Puerto Rican movement group El Comité-MINP, for example), while also highlighting how many of the authors included in this study work against this impulse within insurgent social movements. While this study is not an ethnographic account that provides a definitive history of particular movement groups, it provides analyses of various interethnic (and intergender and intersexual) alliances as they are represented in literary texts. I contend that these representations often work to remedy the historical erasure of these moments in the wake of the nationalist period.

For example, Oscar "Zeta" Acosta notes the presence of Cuban American and Native American organizers as basic to the formation of various Chicana/o movement groups in Los Angeles. Similarly, John Rechy conceives of all forms of oppression as "a hungry evil" (1995, 121),

suggesting that progressive actors must understand the intersecting nature of homophobia, patriarchy, and racism in order to overturn hegemony. Similarly, Piri Thomas attempts to triangulate his Nuyorican identity by leveraging the history of antiracism in African American communities. By considering the triangulations these texts construct, I argue that these authors represent moments where connection with other ethnic groups—both Latina/o and otherwise—is possible, disrupting narratives of purity inherent in many insurgent social movements.

Empire and migration provide Latin Americans with similar experiences *prior* to their arrival in the United States.[20] As Kirsten Silva Gruesz (2002) reminds us, historical commonalities between Latina/o groups in the United States reach back to the nineteenth century and beyond. Through their former (and in the case of Puerto Ricans, ongoing) colonial relations with Spain and the United States, common crops like sugar, the Spanish language, Cubans and Dominicans in Puerto Rico, migrant labor in Florida, Jamaica, and Panama, and music like salsa, merengue, and *reggaetón* that has local differences and regional similarities, these national groups carry logical affiliations. It is my contention that these resonances offer potential for organic interethnic, interracial coalitions capable of effecting larger political changes.

These claims are not intended to essentialize Latina/o identity; on the contrary, they seek to locate common—and voluntary—political associations asserted by various first-person personal narrativists. The texts included in this study offer rich insights into the political implications of nascent Latina/o consciousness. Accordingly, this book demonstrates how authors like Colón, Acosta, Rechy, and Alvarez mediate essentialist notions of identity with larger political and social coalitions. This analysis situates common themes and tactics that might serve as foundations for a variety of interethnic, interracial, and intergender coalitions that defy monolithic conceptions of Latina/o identity.

Scholars William Flores and Rina Benmayor (1997) have championed a concept they call "Latino cultural citizenship" to designate an emerging collective identity structure that links disparate groups with roots in Latin America. Latino cultural citizenship embodies an active political agenda designed to defy traditional notions of political citizenship as conferred by the state. The terms of Latino cultural citizenship are informative for my readings of Latina/o triangulation because they suggest a complete overhaul of mainstream U.S. identity. Rather than understanding these texts

as narrating a subject that exceeds the bounds of a normative U.S. citizen, Latino cultural citizenship helps in envisioning a political subject that serves as the foundation for more egalitarian communities, communities that are themselves based on voluntary interethnic alliances.

Following this logic, it is important to consider that the political articulations of various Chicana/o, Puerto Rican, and Dominican authors constitutes—if not a claim to a larger sociopolitical grouping in the United States—at least a similar logic of empowerment. By examining their triangulations, it becomes possible to comprehend what seem to be incompatible social movements (the Brown Berets and the Young Lords, for example) according to what Michael M. J. Fischer (1986, 230) describes as "families of resemblance." For example, while each group imagined their community differently (reclaiming Aztlán for the Brown Berets, as opposed to the decolonization of Puerto Rico and the enfranchisement of Puerto Ricans living on the mainland for the Lords), both organizations staked claims to an essential identity that served as the basis of social affiliation. Likewise, while the Lords' official position on gender equity was more progressive than the patriarchal one articulated by the Brown Berets, in practice there was little difference between the organizations.

By examining these authors' similar responses to the insufficiencies of racialized subjectivities in the United States and national identities in Latin America, it becomes possible to locate these occluded families of resemblance. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994), Orlando Patterson (1982) and others have noted, while racialization is not a phenomenon confined to life in the United States, the authors included in this study share a common commitment to countering liberal individualism as a primary aspect of their antiracist strategies. Although I am careful not to conflate the similarities and differences between ethnic groups and individual texts, *Triangulations* endeavors to understand the political utility of coalescing in an interethnic alliance like Latina/o. First-person personal narratives offer primary sites where one can glimpse how these authors navigate similar alternatives to the liberal political subject posited by Western systems of thought.

Imagining Community Efficacy in the First-Person Personal Narrative

Reading Latina/o triangulations opens the social and cultural possibilities encoded in these first-person personal narratives. Since these texts narrate

socially embedded subjectivities, it follows that they also provide spaces where multilevel conversations can imaginatively take place between individuals, communities, and social movements. For example, it is well known that authors like Galarza, Colón, and Acosta had links with various social and political movements.[21] By understanding their triangulations, we can see how their texts facilitate conversations between individuals, their communities, and the views espoused by social movements.

As I have noted, one aspect of *Triangulations* is dedicated to tracing an intellectual history of oppositional consciousness in Latina/o communities during the late twentieth century. Part of this work depends on understanding the oppositional strains that operate before this period. Michael Denning (1998) observes that 1960s oppositional groups owed a debt to the Cultural Front of the 1930s. Regardless of whether activists were conscious of how Cultural Front models of activism influenced them, Denning asserts that the 1930s formed part of the collective unconscious that shaped political contestation throughout the last half of the twentieth century.

These complicated dialogues facilitate interethnic and intergenerational conversations in Latina/o first-person personal narratives—what Benedict Anderson (2005) describes as the "zigzags" of history (81). Because history does not progress according to a linear timeline, it moves in fits and starts, engaging other moments across time and space. These zigzags are in part proleptic—they anticipate, dialog with, or foreshadow certain moments in the future. It becomes possible then to read authors like Colón (1961) and Galarza (1971) as essentially speaking from, to, and about similar cultural contexts, political projects, and historical moments.

In a similar vein, *Triangulations* argues that the (sometimes) unconscious strains of political activism within Latina/o communities form part of the fabric of oppositional consciousness activists draw upon to constitute social movements. This book demonstrates how these political strains emerge out of similar logics and oppositional frameworks. For example, how does the failure of the inclusive ethnic Americanism of the Cultural Front propel figures like Galarza and Colón toward increasingly militant positions that anticipate insurgent nationalism? How do the shortcomings of mainstream feminism and the exclusive subjectivities endemic to Latina/o nationalisms of the 1960s relate to the multiple contestations of female authors like Ortiz Cofer and Alvarez? Similarly, how do the disappointments of the civil rights movement and the unfulfilled promise of the sexual revolution contribute to John Rechy's sexual outlaws?

Mapping discursive identities onto social structures in the personal narrative is not a phenomenon associated solely with Latina/o communities in the United States. Citing the function of canonical personal narratives like Franklin's *Autobiography*, Jeffrey Louis Decker (1997) argues that the representation of the self "extends the new concept of individualism to the condition of the U.S. nation." Decker's analysis underscores how Franklin's *Autobiography* is particularly evocative of this ethic, as it advocates "illustrations of the frugality and industry" that would serve as foundations for individualist subjects in the fledgling nation (xix).

The fact that Franklin's *Autobiography* employs a socially engaged representation underscores the need to analyze the complex ways that women and ethnic and racialized subjects use first-person personal narrative forms to contest individualist ideologies. As subjects who are written out of the social contract by figures like Franklin, Latina/os often assert communal identities in an attempt to reconfigure how the nation is imagined. Some of these conceptions of the nation verge on the transnational. Ranging from the articulations of the Brown Berets and the Raza Unida Party who conceived of Aztlán, the mythical homeland of the Aztecs, as a geographic space that straddles the border between the U.S. and Mexico, to the complex understandings of Puerto Rican nationality in both the United States and the island contexts enunciated by groups like the Young Lords, Latina/os often characterized their struggles for space and rights from international, if not transnational, points of view.[22] Since many authors included in this study were involved with twentieth-century social movements, these first-person personal narratives informed and were formed by the political and theoretical currents that swirl around Latina/o cultural nationalist groups. Part of the way that Latina/os were able to conceive of and enact these complex challenges was through the discursive representation of "nations" that linked disparate oppositional traditions in the United States, Latin America, and beyond.

A Few Words about Genre

Given the complex history of criticism dealing with autobiography, *testimonio*, and other life-writing genres, it is important to address the ramifications of focusing on first-person personal narrative forms. Besides quantifying the genre itself, one concern of many critics of autobiography is the tension between fact and fiction in these texts. Books like Oscar

"Zeta" Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, or Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun* invite these questions because they consciously blur the distinctions between truth and fiction. As Marta Sánchez (2005) points out about *Down These Mean Streets*, even texts that claim autobiographical truth often introduce fictional elements.

Rather than understanding the first-person personal narrative from a purely teleological or ontological standpoint, it is important to consider how Latina/o authors blend multiple genres to reveal alternative versions of history and subjectivity. Writing of what she calls "historiographic metafiction," Linda Hutcheon (1989) argues that "in granting new and emphatic value to the notion of 'experience,' feminisms have also raised an issue of great importance to postmodern representation: what constitutes a valid historical narrative? And who decides? This has led to the re-evaluation of personal or life narratives—journals, letters, confessions, biographies, autobiographies, self-portraits" (160).

Hutcheon's point centers on the idea that the "veracity" required in personal narratives is difficult to achieve for people who cannot represent themselves.[23] Because what counts as truth relies on Eurocentric, liberal individualist frameworks, collective utterances are anathema to the system of representation associated with autobiography. Hutcheon therefore urges us to consider how life-writing genres are reconfigured to represent versions of historical events that support communal affirmation.

Similarly, I argue that Latina/os often disrupt life-writing forms in order to destabilize dominant historical narratives and contest exclusive subjectivities. Because it is impossible for an author to represent every event that takes place in even a small segment of a life, it is necessary to select *representative* events to construct a coherent narrative. As literary scholar Charles T. Davis (1979) suggests, that "editing the raw matter of life is necessary" (427) to produce meaning in autobiography. The principles behind this editing usually conform to fiction. Accordingly, I suggest that the veracity of Latina/o first-person personal narratives is less important than the historical material they represent. At the same time, because Latina/o first-person personal narratives question the epistemological foundations of meaning making for aggrieved ethnic subjects, they revise the "I," while also recording alternative versions of the history and culture of their communities.

This argument is not intended to contest the genres of autobiography, memoir, *testimonio*, or other forms of life writing. Neither is my

intention to conflate the historical narrative with fiction. Instead, I concur with Hutcheon and Davis that life writing constitutes a continuum that includes a number of genres and literary forms. *Triangulations* therefore offers one interpretive strategy for uncovering the embedded politics contained in these texts. Concomitantly, the texts that follow provide a rich portrait of the challenges to liberal individualist notions of self, community, and nation mounted by Latina/os during the late twentieth century.

I argue in chapter 1, "Zigzagging through History: Ernesto Galarza, Jesús Colón and the Development of Insurgent Consciousness," that both authors' memoirs triangulate the "inclusive nationalism" of the Cultural Front of the 1930s with the militant practices of the insurgent nationalist period of the 1960s. Galarza's *Barrio Boy* and Colón's *A Puerto Rican in New York* evidence the zigzags of history by demonstrating how the material circumstances of their writing emerge in dialogue with various social movements. Ranging from the trade union activism of the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to the militant positions of groups like the Brown Berets and the Young Lords, both authors represent their history of activism in relation to the politics occurring as they write their books. I further demonstrate how the memoir must be destabilized to accommodate these imagined Latina/o nations. Accordingly, Galarza's and Colón's works constitute a fabric of oppositionality that proposes cultural sites where communal subjectivities are imagined and enacted, if only in circumscribed terms.

In chapter 2, "Crazy for the Nation: Piri Thomas, Oscar 'Zeta' Acosta, and the Urban Outlaw," I argue that Piri Thomas (1967), a Puerto Rican, and Oscar "Zeta" Acosta (1989b) Chicano, deploy the figure of the outlaw in their autobiographical texts in order to politicize their respective communities. Since both authors operate in urban settings, I suggest that the figures of the *vato loco* and urban outlaw offer liberatory models of oppositional consciousness in metropolitan spaces. Since these authors often lived within close proximity to other communities of color, *Triangulations* reconsiders the cultural nationalist movements of the period as interethnic and coalitional from their inception.

The third chapter of *Triangulations*, "Remaking the Insurgent Vision: John Rechy, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and the Limits of Nationalist Morality," also examines the outsider. But as autobiographical novels by Judith Ortiz Cofer (1989) and John Rechy (1977) demonstrate, the revolutionary subjects valorized by cultural nationalist groups were premised on patriarchy

and heteronormativity. Chapter 3 demonstrates how many female and gay and lesbian Latina/os adapt first-person personal narratives to contest these exclusive subjectivities, proposing more complicated and inclusive notions of intersecting identities as alternatives for the imagined social community.

Chapter 4, "I Can't Be Me without My People: Triangulating Historical Trauma in the Work of Julia Alvarez" examines four of Alvarez's novels (1991, 1994, 1997b, 2000). I argue that Alvarez's novels complicate the stability of history, autobiography, and fiction in her literary constructions of Dominican communities on the island and in the United States. Because of the historical trauma inflicted on Dominicans in both homeland and diasporic contexts, a linear, univocal history of the nation can no longer be constructed. Alvarez superimposes her story on historical figures in her novels in order to reimagine history in a manner that resolves the dislocation of migration and exile, while also clearing a space for individual identity and feminine agency. Concomitantly, I show how Alvarez uses generic innovation to imagine interethnic and coalitional Latina/o politics at the intersections of various borders.

The conclusion to *Triangulations*, "New Millennial Triangulations," draws together the arguments in chapters 1 through 4 by considering how understanding textual triangulation allows critics to reconceptualize the political function of Latina/o first-person personal narratives. As a part of this elaboration of triangulation, I provide a brief reading of Sandra Cisneros's 2002 novel *Caramelo* that examines the transformations that take place in twenty-first-century Latina/o first-person personal narratives.