The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion

Documenting Transborder Latinidades: Archives, Libraries, and Digital Humanities

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Abstract

This introductory article serves as an editorial for the special issue, *Documenting Transborder Latinidades: Archives, Libraries, and Digital Humanities,* for volume 6, issue 4, edition of *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, and Inclusion (IJIDI)*. The article lays out some of the fundamental issues and terminologies that are at the heart of the interrelationship between archives, libraries, and the digital humanities, and how they intersect with the lived and documented realities of transborder latinidades. The paper also provides a roadmap and summarization of the core arguments in the articles and case reports of this special issue.

Keywords: archives, digital humanities; latinidades; Latinx; transborder

Publication Type: introductory article

With the growing prominence of reporting on the migration of refugees from Latin America and ensuing allusions to the invasion of the United States by "foreign" bodies, little, if any, attention is paid to the historical, political, cultural, and diasporic through lines between Latinx populations stateside and their relatives and antecedents in the Global South. Confronted with legacies of colonialism and decades of invasion and forced displacement, the mainland United States is compelled to navigate the consequences of its geopolitical machinations and to reckon with the communities, identities, histories, and hybrid cultural formations that have resulted from its interventions in Latin America, alongside nativist and racist policies that have marginalized and stigmatized U.S. Latinx communities.

The term latinidad encompasses communities of Latin American descent; it is an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006, p. 6) based on a geopolitical landscape that emphasizes similarities in language, culture, traditions, and experience (Flores, 2000). These shared experiences play significant roles in conceptualizing "local, regional, national, transnational (global), and hemispheric modalities of belonging" (Coronel-Molina, 2017, p. 9), especially when negotiating transborder and bi/multi-cultural identities within the United States. Despite the similarities and emphasis on "a particular geopolitical experience," latinidad also "contains within it the complexities and contradictions of immigration, (post)(neo)colonialism, race, color, legal status, class, nation, language and the politics of location" (Rodríguez, 2003, pp. 9–10). Indeed, despite being anchored in specific geographies and nation-states, a transborder latinidad reconfigures spaces of identity, political ideology, gender, ethnicity, and race, and it reminds us of the complex interplay of positionalities that constitute diasporic Latin American and Latinx[1] communities throughout the Americas. Constantly shifting between place, language, and culture,

ISSN 2574-3430, https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi
DOI:

transborder latinidades exist at the nexus of intersectionality and hybridity and demonstrate the ability to transgress normative and reductive conceptualizations of belonging and being. The challenge and opportunity at the heart of the transborder experience is this embrace of border crossing (physical, ideological, and identity-based) that resists, specifically, U.S.-based efforts to severely circumscribe and vilify Latin American and Latinx identities and communities and, in turn, to deny their rich and diverse historical, cultural, political, economic, and social contributions (Stephen, 2007; Stephen, 2012; Irazábal, 2013; Tapia Ladino, 2017).

Latinx studies scholars have considered latinidad from the perspectives of problematic homogenization, transnational experience, solidarity and activism, linguistics, race and ethnicity, U.S. immigration studies, queer latinidad, and historiography, including Marta Caminero-Santangelo (2007), Serafín M. Coronel-Molina (2017), Rodrigo Lazo (2016), Marissa K. López (2011), and Juana Rodríguez (2003), among others. Such discussions have brought to the fore questions of gender, especially as expressed through language. Appearing in online forums as early as the 1990s (Rivas, 2017), the term Latinx contests the gender binary while simultaneously disrupting the Spanish (European colonial) language. Much dispute has arisen around the term both in and out of academia. Proponents of the "x" emphasize how the linguistic binary of Latina/Latino erases individuals and communities who did not and do not ascribe to these cis-defined terms. Instead, the "x" attempts to leave space for the entire gender spectrum. Through these disruptions, "Latinx" has the potential to create critical conversations about coloniality, or the colonial structures of power that defined and continue to define culture, labor, knowledge, language, gender, sexuality, class, race and ethnicity (Lugones, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Latinx transgresses defined borders of language and identities, emphasizing fluidity and multiple modes of being.

Since the respective fields' collective inception, the intersection of archives and the digital humanities has been the subject of some debate. While the digital humanities owe their foundations to the materiality of archives, some speculation persists as to whether digital humanists fully acknowledge the praxis and materiality of archives as a reference point (Caswell, 2021; Manoff, 2010; Speck & Links, 2013). At times accused of playing fast and loose with formulations of "archives" or "the archive," digital humanists have contributed to increased dissemination of digitized or born-digital historical resources that have impacted several fields and disciplines, as well as various audiences. Rather than perpetuate that which divides the digital humanities from archives, it is more generative to consider how this boundary-crossing can, instead, serve as a nexus for a transborder latinidad that exerts identity and community on multiple fronts. If archives are, at times, the exclusionary terra firma of historical representation, could the digital humanities, once wrested from their gatekeeping tendencies, provide an intersectional and more democratic vehicle for documentary cross-pollination? How can we combine a community archive's impulse with the possibilities for broader participation and dissemination that is among the promises of the digital humanities?

Clement et al. (2015) assert that "the emergent work of the archives of the future show an increased reliance on a deeper sense of community building among archivists, librarians, and scholars who work with new technologies" (p. 123). Clement et al. also note that archives as sites of collaboration within these communities imply the ongoing negotiation of the stewardship of future archives. In turn, Owens and Padilla (2020) argue that it is indeed the digital reproduction of historical resources that has encouraged a greater focus on primary sources by historians and point towards historian Joshua Sternfeld's suggestion that the "diverse range of products" now being created by historians from digitized sources, which include databases and

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v6i4.39534

visualizations, fall under the genre of "digital historical representations," which proposes a definitional space outside of the more commonly used "digital archive" (Sternfeld, 2011, p. 334, as cited in Owens & Padilla, 2020, p. 10 of 17). Suffice it to say, as the relationship between archivists, librarians, technology, and scholars evolves, so too will the digital, material, and definitional boundaries of archives expand and work towards encompassing a transborder consciousness that incorporates multiple historical realities.

Crossing cultural, geographic, historical, and digital divides, this special issue mines the ties that connect families and communities across the diaspora; how they manifest themselves in archives, digital humanities projects, library collections, and community-based organizations; and their impact on historical and cultural narratives about the movements, contributions, and communal formations of U.S. Latinx and Latin American populations. The documentation and preservation of stories described in this issue speak to the varied lived realities of transborder latinidades and how they represent themselves across diverse media. Divided between research articles, special reports and case studies, and inclusive of digital art, the materials gathered here demonstrate a range of interpretations of the special issue theme and our investment in locating and empowering multiple expressions of transborder latinidades. From Dominican communities in New York and diverse Latinx communities in Ohio, Miami, and Southern California, to transnational historical figures such as the Cuban anarchist Violeta Miqueli and the contemporary digital art of Darleen Martinez, this special issue casts a wide net to capture the many identities, histories, and border crossings that are at the heart of the lives and experiences of Latinx communities and diasporas, and which shatter reductive or homogenizing interpretations of our realities.

As this issue demonstrates, the forefront of this effort to accurately represent the multiplicity of these realities is led by community archives, which "are often formed in reaction to the failure of mainstream archives to tell the accurate and complex stories of marginalized communities" (Caswell et al., 2018, p. 4). These projects, thus, seek to document the lives, experiences, and stories of the Latinx community, which have often been left out, whitewashed, or erased from the historical canon. Community-based archival projects "invite and empower communities to have a stake in their own history, often through practices that value and encourage the participation of their users and larger communities" (Caswell et al., 2018, p. 4). Emily Lynell Edwards's "Digitizing the Archive: Historicizing Latinx Issues in Northwest Ohio" considers how digital humanities archival projects help to (re)produce Latinx community memory, specifically in small institutions, by filling in the archival gaps that have historically marginalized the experiences of Latinx community members. The process of capturing the nuances of latinidad embedded in the archive, as well as making these stories accessible to the community, pose unique challenges, including accessibility. Elena Foulis and Brandon D'Souza discuss how to increase access to public-facing projects in "Archiving Bilingual Latin@ Stories." They describe decolonial approaches toward preserving oral histories through community outreach, bilingual descriptive metadata, and file naming procedures employed for Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio (ONLO). In addition, this article highlights the significance of collaborative work through the involvement of community members and students in the preservation of local histories. Marisa Hicks-Alcaraz's special report, "Voices from the Cracks of the Latina Diaspora: The Counter-Memorias Testimonios Archive," builds on the level of collaboration and *confianza* (trust) required to holistically "collect and generate knowledge." By pushing back against traditional understandings of a homogenous latinidad and archive, the Counter-Memorias Testimonios Archive allows space for new dialogues that more accurately represent the varied experiences of Latinx communities.

ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
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Montse Feu's overview of the revolutionary awakening of anarchist feminist Violeta Miqueli in her article "Violeta Miqueli (1891–1972): U.S, Journalist, Anarchist, Feminist, and Antifascist," traverses multiple countries and historical periods to provide the reader with insight into Miqueli's passionate commitment to anti-fascist and anarcha-feminist thinking and direct action. Written to accompany the digital exhibit, "Fighting Fascist Spain—The Exhibits," and a section that focused on Miqueli, Feu's essay tracks how, through her writings, talks, and activism, Miqueli challenged the boundaries of societal norms surrounding marriage and the role women in society, while effectively organizing workers in New York and Florida, and fighting against fascism in Spain. Transnational and radical in its positioning, Feu's essay serves as a reminder of the need to document the contributions of women throughout the Latinx diaspora particularly.

"Transnational Dominican Activism: Documenting Grassroots Social Movements through ESENDOM" by Nelson Santana, Emmanuel Espinal, and Amaury Rodríguez focuses on the documentation of transnational Dominican activism by journalists. The *ESENDOM* has compiled information on news, culture, sports, and music since 2009. While *ESENDOM* is not a traditional archive or digital repository, the authors underscore its role as a community resource, which not only preserves Dominican culture but also reflects the many transborder latinidades of Dominicanidad. This case study provides a launching point to discuss how grassroots efforts to preserve and share cultural information contribute to history and knowledge production.

"Contingent Colonialities: Mapping *La relación de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*" by Anita Huizar-Hernández, Angela Corsa, Alejandra Encinas García, Carmen Rivero, and Ashely Ávila documents a digital humanities project that applies a decolonial lens to a canonical colonial text. Among the earliest European accounts of North American colonization, *La relación* describes the failed Pánfilo de Narváez expedition and imposes colonial structures onto land, people, cultures, languages, and experiences. The project seeks to decenter the narrative by allowing users to toggle between Cabeza de Vaca's text and the Indigenous descriptions they displaced. By putting into conversation different ontologies and epistemologies, this project creates a space to critically engage with the origins of transborder latinidades.

Katie Coldiron and Julio Capó argue that Miami Studies offers a place-based critical lens for examining transborder latinidades in "Making Miami's History and Present More Accessible." This approach, informed by the fields of ethnic studies, Latinx studies, Black studies, Indigenous studies, urban studies, cultural studies, digital studies, feminist, gender, and queer studies, shifts conversations away from a homogenous experience and toward the translocal to "transcend traditional boundaries" by recognizing the global and transborder identities of the Miami community. They specifically focus on Florida International University's Wolfsonian Public Humanities Lab (WPHL) community-driven digital initiatives, which offer insight into the formation of ethno-racial identities.

"Soy de aquí y de allá: The Selfie as Queer LatinX Representation in Digital Landscapes" features digital art by Darleen Martinez, which explores the multiplicity of identity and culture through the social media form known as the selfie. Employing what Martinez terms a "transglitch performance," these self-portraits create an intentional, queer self-representation that challenges distinct modes of white, cis, heteronormative identification. Martinez asserts the body as an art space from which the artist can perform and enunciate lived experiences. This digital art, much like the archival records, testimonios, and digital projects in this issue, "generate[s] a record of presence" that transcends "real and imagined borders" to demand an

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acknowledgment of existence for marginalized bodies, cultures, languages, communities, and histories.

Overall, this special issue looks towards these multiple iterations of latinidad as a means to explore how cultural heritage workers, community-driven memory projects, archivists, and digital humanists, on both sides of the proverbial border, document and represent the multifaceted nature and dynamism of Latin American and U.S. Latinx life, community culture, migratory experiences, and cultural productions. Aiming to transcend misinformed representations of latinidad, which continue to lack the long view of historical perspective, this special issue provides a counterbalance to these circumscribed narratives, which document the resilience, tenacity, richness, and rebelliousness of the Latin American diaspora and U.S. Latinx communities.

Endnotes

[1] We use the term Latin American to specify people living in Latin America or those who are newly arrived to the United States. We use the term U.S. Latinx to refer to people of Latin American descent who currently live in the United States.

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ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v6i4.39534

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ISSN 2574-3430, jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijidi/index
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