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Latina or Americaniard?

Los autores, textos e ideas siempre han cruzado las fronteras internacionales; sin embargo, no se ha estudiado con la debida atención el reto que estos textos proponen a los proyectos monolingües y nacionales. Los cuentos incluidos en las dos colecciones de Concha Alborg, Una noche en casa *y* Beyond Jet-Lag, *ofrecen una meditación multilingüe y bicultural sobre la vida de una transnacional con lazos emocionales tanto en Estados Unidos como en Europa. Sin embargo, ¿se la podría considerar como autora latina? La pregunta presupone la necesidad de repensar el significado del término, ya que los latinos en los Estados Unidos pocas veces incluyen a inmigrantes de España dentro de un grupo que normalmente está compuesto sólo de nativos de las Américas. Felipe Alfau, otro autor español inmigrado a los Estados Unidos, inventa el neologismo "Americaniards" para describir a sus personajes y captar esta ambigüedad de identidad. A través de una lectura de algunas selecciones de los cuentos de Alborg, este artículo explora las implicaciones de ese tipo de problemática ideológica y epistemológica sugerida por la dificultad terminológica.*

Authors, texts, and ideas have always moved across international borders; yet to the degree that they confound monolingual and nationally-based literary projects, such crossings and meditations have been insufficiently studied even by an academic audience that prides itself on its border-crossing analytic abilities. The literary history of the Spanish fascination with the United States dates back to the founding of the country itself, and in the 20th century has been nourished by the likes of Federico García Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* and Carmen Martín Gaite's *Caperucita en Manhattan*. These are works by clearly canonical Spanish writers who have some, and sometimes considerable, familiarity with the US and have chosen its landscapes as their thematic siting. A somewhat different case can be presented for immigrant writers like Barcelona-born Maria-Dolors Boixadós, who has lived in the US for many years and taught at the University of Tennessee and at the University of Puerto Rico. Her 1991 novel, *Gabriel: coda final*, for example, is a binational project at its most fundamental level of conception. Based on the author's copious research into cases of mistreated and

abandoned children in the United States, Boixadós retells these stories in a highly lyrical form. Nevertheless, despite its universalizing tone (e.g. the central character in this musically-inspired text is called simply "la Madre"), this work is unlikely to be read as a US novel. In the first place, it is not set in the US, it is written in Spanish and published in Spain, and internal references to Madrid, Andalucía, and other sites in Spain suggest the transatlantic transposition of these heart-wrenching case studies.

In still another category is the paradigmatic case of Felipe Alfau, whose parents immigrated to the US with him when he was fourteen years old. His best-known novel, *Chromos* (a sequel to his *Locos: A Comedy of Gestures*, written in 1928), like all his prose, was written in English. Drafted in the 1940s in between his work as a translator for Morgan Bank, though not published until much later, the novel is set in an eccentric Spanish enclave in New York City and focuses on the comings and goings of a group of immigrant Spaniards around a bar called El Telescopio. *Chromos* has been much praised for being dramatically ahead of its time, anticipating the later styles of quintessentially US-identified postmodern writers like Thomas Pynchon and John Barth, and it was nominated for the National Book Award when it was finally released in 1990, thus cementing its impeccable credentials within a US literary genealogy. An analogous case is offered by Concha Alborg, who also came to the United States as an adolescent. In some ways similar to Alfau, although in a more overtly autobiographical frame, in the linked stories that make up her *Una noche en casa* and *Beyond Jet-Lag*, Alborg offers a multilingual and bicultural meditation on a life caught between America and Europe. These latter writers – Boixadós, and especially Alfau and Alborg – arguably can be considered US writers in the same way that we always think of Vladimir Nabokov and Jerzy Kosinski as US writers.

But are they Latino/a writers? And what do we mean by the term "Latino/a"? In its most general sense, as Mike Davis argues, "the idea of the Latino is fertile precisely because it is problematic" (xv). Ironically in view of the marginalization and exclusionary practices that often negatively impact US Latinos/as,[1] frequent and bitter debates over who or what constitutes "real latinidad" infamously mar efforts at coalition-building. At what point, for example, does an immigrant cease to be an alien resident and become a Latina? If María Lugones is a Latina, then is Concha Alborg also? In his study, Davis (xv-xvi) quite rightly makes a helpful distinction between the too-often essentializing discourse of identity, "the Latino" and the intellectual construct of what he calls an "idea." This "idea of the Latino" signals nodes where the discourse of culture is articulated in ways other than through the traditional dichotomy of center versus periphery, even as some of the most direct effects of the political structuration of nation-states play themselves out on the very material Latino/a body. In this respect, suggests Mike Davis in his articulation of what he calls "the crossover aesthetic," "Latinos are already deeply American, they derive from a North/South divide that is yielding a new geography, and they are thoroughly engaged in the project of further defining what Americanness means" (xvii).

Davis' evocation of the north/south divide points precisely to our problem here. Fundamentally and typically, while retaining a focus on Spanish language heritage as part of their self-definition, Latinos/as are generally reluctant to include Spanish-origin immigrants in the folds of a concept that is generally imagined in strictly American (in the continental sense) terms. On other grounds, this is not an unreasonable exclusion. Certainly, on the one hand, US-Spanish citizens in some senses more logically "belong" to the ethnoclass of European immigrants; yet, on the other, the discourse of race and ethnicity in the US is such that dominant society almost always subsumes these immigrants and their families into a different ethnic group, into the Latino/a identity that often rejects them.

Felipe Alfau, in a fortuitous coining that helps capture this ambiguity of identity, calls his characters "Americaniards." For her part, Alborg notes:

> my immigrant background, more than any other factor, defines me and makes me what I am today ... Latina in some ways, but not from the Hispanic countries that are better known to the American reader – Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico – yet linked to them by culture and language. A language that I have to abandon sometimes to be understood even if I don't fully do so myself. (*Jet-Lag* 7-8)

At the same time, this language, more than any other factor, is what dominant society uses to catalogue her, and in that categorization, she will inevitably fall into the same group as the better known immigrants from this continent:

> The minute we opened our mouths, we were foreigners ... Like to answer the mantra question of "Where are you from?"
> —Espain, we'd answer in chorus.
> —Really? Oh! I love Mexico! (*Jet-Lag* 11)

This foreignness, both projected onto her and self-identified, becomes the basis for her bifocal vision, her habit of seeing things from a perspective that is both familiar and distanced. Moreover and equally importantly, Alborg is not just any foreigner, but one specifically identified with a familiar US minority – the Mexican immigrant.

The context of this particular special issue of *Desobra* seems a particularly fruitful one for testing the usefulness of thinking together the possible conjunction of Spanish and Latina, and Concha Alborg's short story collections serve well as a case study for imagining the potential contribution of the US-Spanish writer to this broadened concept of Latinidad. In Alborg's case, this "Latina" quality necessarily foregrounds her gender identity as well, and both concepts

come together in a performative exploration of her fictional / autobiographical self. Alborg comments: "during the last seven years I have been publishing literary fiction based on my own life experiences which have taken shape in two collections of short stories or novels" ("Deconstruction" 1). Fiction/life, short story/novel, Spanish/English: Alborg's work typically plays on the borderlines of these genres, moving between languages, nations, and culture-based constructions of gender. In her influential *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler asks: "to what extent does the effort to locate a common identity as the foundation for a feminist politics preclude a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity itself?" (xi). Alborg, like her US Latina counterparts, would find something odd in this phrasing, in Butler's suggestion of a line of thought derived from a normative sense of a "common" identity. For Alborg, as for other Latina writers, identity is a vexed proposition: situational, multiple, ambiguous, positional, and mutating. Nevertheless, following Butler's influential intuition about the performative nature of identity, and putting together Alborg and Butler, we can link projections of ethnicity and gender. Such a project suggests that Alborg, like Butler, is concerned with how to bridge the chasm between (a transnational, positional, feminine) identity and (a national imagination of) cultural politics.

Octavio Paz (54-55), in a speech given in Miami in 1987, makes an apposite commentary, focusing his discussion on the breakdown of the old, assumed American symmetry: English in the north, Spanish in the south. He reminds his audience that many canonical works and authors associated with the Hispanic tradition need to be re-read both biculturally and transatlantically as well as hemispherically; the aforementioned *Poeta en Nueva York* is a prime example for him, as is Juan Ramón Jiménez's *Espacio*, which was written in an acute awareness of that poet's surroundings in Coral Gables. In this discussion, Paz notes as well the growing bilingualism of many parts of the US, and the need to think of the US literary culture without constraint by narrow geopolitical concerns. In some ways like the Mexican poet, Concha Alborg too speaks to the increased field offered by having more than one language and culture to choose from in her creative work, and of speaking from an eccentric (i.e. unexpected, decentered) perspective within the US debates about immigrants coming from Spanish-dominant countries.[2]

Una noche en casa is at least in part an ironic title, since the location of the "casa" that defines her homespace is for the narrator an ambiguous and shifting one. As Paz Macías Fernández perceptively notes in her review of this book, Alborg is "siempre recién llegada en el umbral, eternal extranjera en su casa" (215). Alborg's narrative frame derives from and refers consistently to her present life in the US; Spain is evoked only through nostalgia and the fictions self-consciously created through an act of remembering.[3] Her brief prologue begins: "durante los años que he vivido transplantada en los Estados Unidos, he añorado mucho a España" (9), thus positing the US as her primary field of reference and Spain as the secondary, beloved, but remote landscape. Her memories, then, have to traverse both space and time, and cross through two languages (English and Castilian) to return to her family's original Valencian. This passage cannot occur without leaving significant residue.

Una noche en casa is written almost entirely in Spanish, but the presence of the other two languages makes itself felt at key moments. The story "El gos" relies on the reader's ability to read (or guess at) Valencian, since the punchline at the end of the tale is delivered in that language without translation: "Tía per que vosté ho sapia, el gos a estat jogant mitja vesprada amb eixa pruna" (70). Analogously, a later story relies on the reader's knowledge of English for this exchange between Concha[4] and her husband, Peter: "—¿No te pone celoso todo este rollo de Jordi? —Not at all, I like Jordi too" (131). In this latter case, the narrator depends on her audience to catch the ambiguity in the verb "to like," and to appreciate the cultural nuance of an attraction that can range from merely friendly to openly sexual.

In these stories, her awareness of that transcultured identity shapes her perceptions, which, uncannily, come home to Spain as filtered through the United States. Often, in fact, the frame that gives the individual stories their narrative motivation comes directly from the US. "A tropezones," for example, begins with the author's evocation of an article in an international edition of a newspaper she receives in the US; "Solita Aguilera" opens with the narrator packing "la misma [maleta] con la que me vine a los Estados Unidos" (59). Her doll Gisela, "la recordé al asistir al ballet del mismo nombre en una producción del American Ballet Theatre al aire libre en el teatro de Philadelphia" (141). "El abrigo de pata de gallo" starts with the sentence, "Tengo un catarro" (111), bridging the way to a discussion of childhood ailments from present affliction; and the title story, "Una noche en casa" blurs the location of "casa" from the first words: "Cuando vuelvo a España de visita desde los Estados Unidos" (117), where everything that is suggested by the verb "volver" is retracted with the frase "de visita."

In other stories, time is marked by the immigrant's before and after, where the "after" frequently exists for her only in tales heard at second hand, so that Spain is already a distanced narrative construct rather than a part of her lived experience: thus, Jordi and Oscar's mother gives birth to another child "poco tiempo después de irnos a los Estados Unidos" (126). Similarly, her doll Manolín's concrete existence in her present-tense world brings to mind a past she did not personally witness: "fue el único que se salvó de la quema porque me lo traje conmigo a los Estados Unidos. Está sentado en un rincón de mi dormitorio" (140). Inevitably, in such a context, the generic boundaries between autobiography and fiction blur.

Even when the United States is not the explicit frame, her life in this country shapes all her experiences and perceptions, serving as a point of comparison or

contrast. At times the US serves as the basis from which success is measured: "Mis tres primas estudiaron carrera, trabajan y tienen sus propias familias en una situación que sería envidiable inclusive en los Estados Unidos" (49). At other times, she shies away from the "what if?" question, as in this slightly awkward comment, insistently phrased in the subjunctive mode: "Nos preguntamos qué hubiera pasado si yo no me hubiese quedado en los Estados Unidos – una pregunta que me inquieta y prefiero no hacerme" (131).

In her second volume, *Beyond Jet-Lag*, by way of contrast, and as the narrator herself notes, "Spain has become a point of reference" (8). In many ways this volume continues almost seamlessly from the first. Thus, *Una noche en casa* ends with a story that describes the father's scholarship, his opportunity to come to the United States to work in a university in the distant city of Seattle, Washington. That story – and the volume – ends with the family aboard a plane taking off into the clouds from Madrid. In *Beyond Jet-Lag*, the narrator describes a sense of never quite arriving, while definitely having left, of remaining in a floating in-between space. Her metaphor in this second collection, one famously common to many Caribbean writers, is the airplane: "Sometimes I think that I belong flying over the Atlantic, either not quite in Spain yet, but anticipating ... the trip. Or coming back relieved that I don't have to live there anymore ... I want to be American when I'm here, Spanish when I get there. Actually, it works just the opposite and I know it" (7). In a later story she adds: "A veces es al volver de un viaje cuando noto los contrastes más agudamente" (156).

Adolescent Concha despairs: "How was I ever going to become an American with such foreigners for parents?" (69). Here, ironically, in the youthful lament of any child of immigrants, Alborg simultaneously registers her desire and points to a crucial marker of the perceived distance yet to travel; for her, and not just for her parents, becoming an American is always an asymptotic process of approximation that can never quite reach the desired goal. Later, the narrator comments: "I realize now how un-American I must have been then" (72), defining a before and an after, and retaining a residue of anxiety inimical to the native-born from the dominant culture. At the same time, this unresolved anxiety precisely captures Davis' concept of the "the crossover aesthetic" that in another sense makes Latinos/as so deeply and quintessentially American.

Interestingly enough, one of Alborg's proposed solutions to this floating life is to take part in another archetypal US adventure: the cross-country road trip. In some sense, then, the long plane ride from Madrid to Seattle finds its compensatory anchoring in the even longer car trip from Seattle to Niagara Falls. During this trip, in addition to stopping at all the advertised "world's largest" sites, Concha works out the kinks in the Asian-inflected English she has been learning in the Seattle vocational school, and the family delicately begins to negotiate the edges and overlaps between what is done in "typical American style" (14) and what must be retained in "practically Spanish style" (17).

In this second fictional autobiographical volume, Alborg writes about one-half of the stories in this volume in Spanish and the other half in English. The context determines the language. Thus, her stories about Madrid, the Caribbean, a trip to Nicaragua, an interview with Hispanic writers, a conversation with a US-Venezuelan friend, a visit to a *peluquería* all take place in Spanish. On the other hand, her stories about a trip to the Chicago Art Museum, about a social event in the US, about her US neighbor all are written in English. These are situational choices, based on the language appropriate to the space in which the story is set, and to that space's cultural expectations.

At the same time, Alborg's knowledge of her own inescapable bifocality, originally described with the metaphor of the airplane and conditioned by her wry recognition of always being slightly out of place, inflects all of these stories. Whether Spanish or English, the other language and other identity ineluctably run under the chosen main voice. Thus, for example, Concha explains at the beginning of one of the English language stories, "This is one of those stories that I must write in English, because how would I explain in Spanish what a senior prom is?" She nevertheless makes what she knows is a futile gesture in the direction of cultural approximation via an ultimately unhelpful linguistic reference: "it's something like a 'quinceañera' festivity in Puerto Rican culture ... but we don't have anything like that in Spain, so it still wouldn't help" (67). Similarly, a later story begins: "The concept of the girl next door doesn't exist in Spanish: someone who represents the goodness, the familiarity of the all-American female ... How different it is in French, for example, where 'femme à côté' is rather a temptation" (93). Here again, Alborg offers a sleight of hand, a term, this time in French, a language that is no more helpful than her inadequate Spanish. In both these cases, the explanation – why English? – comes from a sense of a lack or deficiency in Spanish to define a cultural nuance. It also points to an implicit dialogue originally begun in the opposite language from the one used in the story. The projection across languages and cultures is clear. English better captures the concept of the prom, or the sleepover, or the girl next door, as well as the way her own performative sense of gender plays into and against these US dominant culture stereotypes; yet Alborg feels the urgency to explain these cultural phenomena in a way that is only required for someone coming from, or projecting to, an audience in that other cultural space.

Describing one of her own adolescent house parties to her English language reader is relatively easy, but she despairs of making the cultural transition: "Even the food was of red tones: strawberries and cream, Jello with marshmallows, how would I ever explain this to my mother when I got home?" (71). In a parallel fashion, from the other side, in the Spanish-language story "Alter ego" Alborg writes, in direct contrast to the sentiment expressed in *Una noche en casa*: "A veces me pregunto cómo hubiese sido mi vida si yo no hubiera emigrado a este país" (30), where the imagined alter ego's Spanish life is indelibly inflected by

the distancing experience of having lived for many years in the US, and the expression of this concern is anchored linguistically in a double use of the subjunctive mode, a verbal form unavailable to the English speaker.

The crossover between cultures and languages suggests Alborg, operates in two directions, not just in the direction of English, but also and at the same time retaining the capacity to move back into the Spanish symbolic orders and inflect and reflect upon those cultural forms as well. In one of her stories she mentions "some leftover Spanish hang-up" (*Jet-Lag* 54), where the presumed cultural content comes from Spain, but the concept of "hang-up" is impeccably US-derived. Something is always being produced in cultural contact, a mixture, a doubleness, that is often read as performative. This doubleness may pose a challenge to the narrator and her characters; it does not always mean trouble (Butler), schizophrenia (Palumbo-Liu), or loss. It may, in fact, be the source of surprisingly valuable insights. It could be a desirable position. Along such lines, Doris Sommer asks, "if you could cure your double consciousness ... would you want to? Almost everyone else I have asked has answered no" (305). A hang-up, Alborg might tell us, is not necessarily a bad thing.

American/Latino/Americaniard dreams are tracked and transmitted in multiple and nuanced ways in these changing relationships. Palumbo-Liu says it well:

> as the context for cultural production is dramatically shifted out of a simply articulated local space and placed instead within the nexus of forces that exceed the immediate influences of the local, "culture" takes place on a shifting terrain that is increasingly contextualized within a dialectal reformulation of local and global. (269)

In recent years there has been an increasingly urgent call to rethink the US's understanding of itself, and bilingualism – as a right, a problem, or a resource (see Poblete [xvi-xvii]) – is integral to these reconceptualizations. Alfred Arteaga writes trenchantly:

> the presence of an alternative, extant, and *literate* linguistic tradition causes a crisis for Anglo America; not only does it preclude the status for English as sole, unchallenged mode for civilized American discourse, but it also undermines several myths that are at the very heart of the self-image propagated by Anglo America. (22)

Almost a decade later, Kirsten Silva Gruesz defines the project of her book, *Ambassadors of Culture*, as: "to push Anglophone readers into grappling seriously with Spanish as an essential literary language of the United States" (xvi). She adds later, echoing Arteaga's challenge: "the challenge posed by the changing demographics of the United States is not so much to accommodate Latinos to an existing national tradition, but to reconfigure that tradition to acknowledge the continuous presence of Latinos within and around it" (10). Emily Apter talks about "translational transnationalism as a conceptual counterweight to cosmopolitan literariness," adding that "though we are still far from experiencing post-national culture, there are signs everywhere that national identities in the marketplace of international aesthetics may be increasingly difficult to decipher" (70) from a monocultural, monolingual perspective. For Apter, following Balibar, "transnationalism" is an activist term, allowing for access, cultural reciprocity; the modifier "translational" evokes the exchanges that occur when languages cross national borders. In the Spanish-language academic setting scholars and students can fruitfully explore how identity reshapes discursivity, and the reverse: that is, how different discursive universes refashion identitarian claims.

The Conference on the Relation between English and Foreign Languages in the Academy, held at New York University in April 2002, brought together some of the US's most distinguished scholars to think precisely about the policy and intellectual consequences of these pedagogically driven problems. Over and over participants urged a recognition that Spanish is in fact the US's second national language (Alonso 1138; Pratt 1283; Stanton 1267); at the same time many of them commented on the increasing phenomenon of English departments taking on and fiercely guarding the rights to all literatures written in all languages of the world, including Spanish (and taught in translation, of course) (Bartholomae 1272; Greene 1242; Stanton 1269). Ironically, this academic colonization by English is taking place at the same time that scholars find themselves increasingly uncomfortable with a theoretical position based on western premises.

As Kutzinski notes, "that imaginative writers tend not to respect national boundaries in this hemisphere and in others, has added to many academic Americanists' confusion about borders, and may well be a reason why a US-centric field like American Studies is so unduly worried about the so-called hegemony of literature and literary studies" (56-57). This primary concern is curiously paired to its contradictory other side: a worry about how to mitigate the adulteration migrant writers could potentially enact on that space. Border crossing is one of the preferred metaphors of recent theory; it seems, though, that – following Kutzinski's metaphor – most border crossing writers have yet to be given their naturalization papers and full citizenship in the republic of letters.

At the very least, the bilingual writer like Concha Alborg should find a natural community in the bilingual readers from these academic homes, which are structurally marked by the constant realignments of crossing between cultural and linguistic boundaries. She helps us to focus a critique of knowledge and of cultural practices in a site of contested meanings. It is no coincidence, furthermore, that meanings have been contested and doubt raised in these specific academic locations precisely because of the historical juncture that has placed these individuals in positions to raise questions and to influence the rethinking

of founding assumptions of the literary field. Thus, among other influences, new diasporic communities interrupt old, ongoing conversations in the US about the relation between nation and identity, about hemispheric consciousness and the US's role in an increasingly globalized world, about the way theory and literary practice are imagined and validated in traditional academic settings.

In his recent *Local Histories/Global Designs* Walter Mignolo makes a radical proposition about the future of academic work, suggesting that if the ideal concept of the university in the past was grounded in the values of reason, culture, excellence, and expertise, the university of the future "shall be envisioned in which the humanities will be rearticulated on *a critique of knowledge and cultural practices*" (xii). Mignolo, I believe, is working out of a crucial awareness derived from this time of epistemological crisis, a realization that what we traditionally call "knowledge" involves a sort of willing complicity of scholars in which certain kinds of cultural inscriptions are selected from a complex social field and given privileged status. For Mignolo, as for many other contemporary scholars, it is precisely this privilege that is a matter for concern, for all too often hierarchies of status feed into and confirm already existing stereotypes. Thus, Mignolo – who as an Argentine-American explicitly claims his bifocal bi-location as a border crosser between Latin American and US structures of knowledge and power – offers a somewhat uneasy solution to the problem of a lack of strong theoretical center in contemporary literary studies. He locates himself firmly on the dash between Argentine and American, on the slash that separates the local and the global in his book's title, suggesting a fruitful collision/collusion of conflicting knowledge claims.

In the abstract, this sounds like an appealing, if destabilizing, resolution to the problem. Other concerns crop up almost immediately, however. John Beverley asks: "I would like to ask what it means today to articulate pedagogically the identity 'American' in the context of the rapid Hispanization – in both demographic and cultural-linguistic terms – of US society" (162). The implicit challenge in these commentaries goes beyond modifying existing curricula and introducing texts, to changing ways of thinking in the academic sites where authority is vested in particular disciplinary and departmental divisions of labor. A broader and more accurate understanding of US American Studies will have to recognize that "all national traditions are plural rather than singular" (Gunn 18), going very much against the grain of the traditional model of studies, which has been "national literatures defined in relation to historically homogeneous cultures" (Gunn 21).[5] A more open analysis of US literature in the context of its global network and multilingual reach is as yet a utopic project.

To remedy this existing lack of a fully realized curricular project, even in a small way, we need to take account of the severely under-addressed challenge presented by Latinos/as writing in Spanish from their bases in the US. Walter Mignolo asks: "From 'where' will I rethink? ... Would it be possible to build on a foundation that is not the foundation that allowed for the justification of national imperial languages and their complicity with knowledge?" He answers his questions with the appeal to "begin to think from border languages instead of from national languages" (256). Is Alborg's Spanglish collection of short stories a model for how one might conceive of these border languages?

I now rejoin the discussion at my point of entry with the conceptual query: *Latina* or *Americaniard*? "Americaniard" has the attraction of accuracy, but with contrast to "Latina" the disadvantage of a weak socio-political base. However, in the points of intersection between discourses of globalization and academically-driven explorations of identity-speak, the term "Latino/a," carrying its inevitable hint of strategic essentialism and politically-driven agendas, has become a perhaps too-popular buzz word, engendering a dangerous homogenization and appropriation even among well-informed and well-meaning scholars. Or, more pessimistically perhaps, we are lead to conclude that commodification always accompanies activist efforts in this globalized moment in history. Here, finally, we can take a lesson from Stuart Hall, who writes sagely, "there is no safety in terminology. Words can be transcoded against you, identity can turn against you, difference can turn against you ... Don't clutch on to the word, but do clutch on to certain ideas about it" (299). Clutching to the "idea of Latina" will inevitably give rise to a new epistemology, a new way to think about knowledge claims, about the disciplinary boundaries in current higher education, and about the stories we tell ourselves that set public policy.

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NOTES

1. See, for example, Chabram-Dernersesian's sobering summary.
2. Other eccentric positions are also beginning to gain greater currency as understanding grows that not all immigrants from countries where Spanish is the official language are necessarily Spanish speakers. US Latinos/as include Mixtec and Zapotec people from Mexico, members of the many Maya nations of Guatemala, Quechua and Aymara speakers from the Andes, etc. Alborg herself, in her first book, includes passages in Valencian to counterpoint the family's first displacement, from Valencia to Madrid.
3. In her introduction, Josefina Aldecoa comments that "Concha Alborg ha tenido el privilegio de recuperar desde su patria americana, el olor y el sabor y la tierna presencia de su infancia española" (8). I would argue, rather, that Alborg's achievement in her work resides precisely in holding this recuperation always at a distance, mediated by nostalgia and the inevitable presence of her life in the US.

4 Here and in what follows, I use "Concha" to refer to the character in the stories and Alborg to refer to the author.

5 Werner Sollers reminds us that this provincialism of American Studies was not always the case: "originally, an 'Americanist' was a person who studied American Indian languages. Later, writing about 'American literature' meant describing, analyzing, and criticizing works that were written or published in the many different languages in the various colonies and in the United States" (*Multilingual* 5).

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