

SARGASSO

2012-13, I & II

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CUBA GLOBAL / GLOBAL CUBA
PERSPECTIVES FROM THE 21ST CENTURY

SARGASSO 2012-2013, I & II
Cuba Global/Global Cuba

Sargasso, a peer-reviewed journal of literature, language, and culture edited at the University of Puerto Rico, publishes critical essays, interviews, book reviews, as well as poems and short stories. The journal seeks submissions that have not been published elsewhere, including new translations of previous publications. *Sargasso* particularly welcomes material written by/about the people of the Caribbean region and its multiple diasporas. Unless otherwise specified, essays and critical studies should conform to the guidelines of the *MLA Handbook*. Short stories should be kept to no more than 2,500 words in length and poems to thirty lines. See our website for submission guidelines and additional information. For inquiries or electronic submissions, write to: sargassojournal@gmail.com.

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San Juan, Puerto Rico 00931-2831

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REVIEWS



Photo by Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo

Emerson said of Whitman, “I find incomparable things said incomparably” which clearly, to this reviewer at least, “must yet have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start.”¹

Michael Sharp
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Dorsia Smith Silva (ed.). *Latina/Chicana Mothering*. Toronto: Demeter Press, 2011, 258 pages.

Dorsía Smith Silva has amassed a versatile collection of narrative essays on mothering and articles that include discussions on mothering research and literary criticism on mothering counter narratives, all of which interweave myriad historical, cultural, religious, social, economic legal, and political factors that color the lives of mothers, particularly those fully immersed in Latina/Chicana contexts.

Sumira Kawash, in her extensive article “New Directions in Motherhood Studies” (2011), provides a comprehensive overview of scholarship on mothering. However, none of her hundred plus references deal exclusively with Hispanic mothering. For the most part, articles or sections related to Latina/Chicana mothering are scattered throughout numerous sociological, feminist and other anthologies, journals, and book-length studies (see Grace Chang, *Disposable Domestic: Immigrant Workers in the Global Economy*, 2000; Dolores Delgado Bernal, C. Alejandra Elenes, Francisca E. Godines and Sofia Villenas, *Chicana and Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*, 2006; Andrea O’Reilly, *Feminist Mothering*, 2008.) In an effort to focus on mothering research, the Association for Research on Mothering was founded in 1998 by Dr. Andrea O’Reilly of York University, Canada. In 2010, the Association was replaced by The Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement. The Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering has evolved into the Journal of the Motherhood Initiative and is affiliated with Demeter Press, all of which continue to actively foster research on mothering across the globe.

¹ Letter of R.W. Emerson to Walter Whitman, July 21, 1855.

Smith Silva's anthology is one of a growing number on mothering by Demeter Press and numerous other publishers. What sets this volume apart is the work's exclusive focus on aspects of Latina/Chicana mothering. The authors analyze mothering issues among Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Salvadorians, Cubans, and Mexicans in their countries of origin and in diaspora populations. In spite of this variety of contexts, the authors find common ground and justify the need to research mothering and disseminate findings in order to improve the overall health and well-being of mothers who are often underappreciated, misunderstood, and left to struggle under sometimes stifling circumstances to raise their children well. This anthology also provides current bibliographies that embrace various disciplines and serve as a comprehensive point of departure for anyone concerned with mothering issues, particularly in reference to Latinas and Chicanas.

In her introduction to the anthology, Smith Silva adeptly provides a brief overview of the literature on Latina/Chicana mothering, making this section a noteworthy contribution to an emerging area of study. The anthology is divided into four sections. Bittersweet honesty reverberates in the personal narratives in the first section of the text, *Telling Our Tales: Testimonios*. Puerto Rican author Mayra Santos-Febres shares her haunting experience with inverted mother and daughter roles while navigating the murky waters of Alzheimer's. Ana Castillo, a Chicana poet and writer, reflects on her college son's return to the nest of a single mother. Dominican Pulitzer Prize winning author Junot Diaz reflects on his intense and constantly evolving relationship with his mother. The inclusion of illuminating texts by several male authors in an anthology on mothering mirrors the editor's inclusive bent and demonstrates that men can provide valuable research and insight into the topic. In "Journey to Mothering," Smith Silva relates her very personal journey through conception, pregnancy and early motherhood in an adoptive Puerto Rican culture. Dominican writer Angie Cruz, in her contribution "Learning the Hard Way," elaborates on academic mothering as she narrates the trials of bundling her two-month-old son off to an academic conference and justifies the need for a support system. "Mi Madre, Mi Hija y Yo" provides the forum for Chicana writer/researcher Michelle Tellez as she reinforces the crucial mothering role of grandmothers and the significance of revisiting the homeland in strengthening Latina/Chicana mothering. The overwhelming focus on mothering in academia in this section might have been balanced with nonacademic narratives, but admittedly, it is primarily middle-class writers and researchers who provide

mothering narratives. The voices of poor and working-class women are mostly heard in research studies in which they are interviewed or observed and in this context, in the second and third sections of the anthology, they are duly represented. While Smith Silva discusses lesbian mothering, a topic which has gained increasing attention in mothering research and provides solid references on the topic, a narrative contribution addressing this perspective would have provided greater insight into this contemporary take on mothering. It is worth noting that upon reading and responding to the narratives, some readers will be motivated to tell their own stories through written or spoken text. This alone makes reading the book worthwhile.

In Part 2 of the anthology, *Counting the Ways to Mother: Communities and Resources*, women reach beyond kinship responsibilities to a more encompassing stance of caring in their communities, schools, and workplaces. In “Life, Death, and Second Mothering: Mexican American Mothers, Gang Violence, and La Virgen de Guadalupe,” Chicano researcher Richard Mora, through an analysis of interviews conducted with mothers who have lost children to gang violence, illustrates how these experiences and their *marianismo*, adoration of the Virgin Mary, empowers them to engage in community involvement that fosters hope for themselves and their communities.

The positive aspects of adolescent mothering are considered in “No hay nada tan mala... (There is Nothing So Bad): Latina Mothering across Generations.” Here Laura Ruth Johnson, a qualitative ethnographic researcher focuses on Puerto Rican mothers in Chicago. “Their experiences also speak to the significance of sharing stories and life lessons across generations of Latina women, and how this storytelling comprises an important element of Latina mothering” (100). Mexican American Gilda L. Ochoa informs readers on “Transformational Caring: Mexican American Redefining Mothering and Education.” From data collected in in-depth interviews and participant observation in Los Angeles, Ochoa identifies Mexican American mothers’ strategies of fostering education in their communities, underscoring the need to encourage the cooperation of men and children in this endeavor.

Part 3 explores “Scenes of La Familia: Facing Challenges.” In “Latina Teenage Mothering: Meanings, Challenges and Successes,” Elizabeth Trejos-Castillo and Helyne Frederick review research on Latina teen mothers. While they acknowledge that considerable research has been conducted on Latina teenage pregnancy, they conclude that more attention needs to be paid to the

lives of young Latina mothers after they give birth. This research could be employed to improve social programs for these young mothers.

In “Motherhood Unbound: Homeless Chicanas in San Francisco,” Anne Roschelle reports on her research which consisted of extensive interviews and participant observation and took place over a four-year period. She criticizes the “Culture of Poverty” approach that argues that poor families of color are responsible for their own poverty as a result of pathological values. Roschelle posits, “There is a long history in the social sciences field of arguing that women of color share a common disdain for marriage and traditional family values” (141). Likewise, the poor tend to be blamed for nonmarital births, single parenthood, and welfare, yet Roschelle’s and other studies reveal that poor women do value marriage, but are plagued by “gender mistrust.” This causes them to avoid the social byproducts of poverty including domestic violence, sexual jealousy, and fear of infidelity and the inability of men to provide financially for their families. Roschelle suggests that research like hers refutes stereotypes and fosters the provision of more humane and effective social welfare policies.

In “Surviving Political Warfare and Trauma: Consequences for Salvadorian Mother-Daughter Relationships,” Mirna E. Carranza expounds on the effects of a violent 12-year civil war and subsequent emigration to Canada. Her in-depth interviews reveal that Salvadorian mothers view Canada as “strange” and “unsafe.” Lacking the support of the extended family and burdened with the traumatic stress of wartime memories, mothers fear for their daughters and may resort to what many daughters feel are excessive attempts to control them. Clearly, any community or government support for these mothers and daughters must take their war experiences and their displacement into account.

In the fourth section, “The Ties that Bind: Literary and Cultural Representations of Latina/Chicana Mothers,” Mary Lou Babineau analyzes the counter-narratives of Mexican author Angeles Mastretta and Chilean Author Pía Barros. Babineau’s analysis of Barros’ short story “Artemisa” adroitly presents a gripping counter narrative as we observe how Luisa completely rejects her infant’s attempts to breastfeed. In a surreal ending, Luisa panics as nipples begin to appear all over her body, the milk saturates the sheets, and her child begins to suck the cloth. In a political novel that focuses on the career of a scrupulous man determined to become governor, Babineau elaborates on the ways that patriarchy dominates the lives of Mexican women, especially André’s

wife Catalina, and how she totally rejects her maternal role as caregiver to her own biological children along with those of André's lovers. Babineau summarizes the accomplishment of both authors, "In their portrayal of the aversion and dissociation that these protagonists experience towards their own pregnant and post-partum bellies, as well as their strong feelings of isolation, alienation, and rejection towards their children, ...these narrative works represent significant transgressions of traditional patriarchal conceptions of motherhood" (177). Babineau demonstrates how the good/bad mother dichotomy deserves scrutiny.

In "Contesting the Meaning of Latina/Chicana Motherhood: Familism, Collectivist Orientation, and Nonexclusived Mothering in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*," Yolanda Martínez challenges cultural concepts of mothering traditionally identified with Latino cultures as the women characters seek individuality. In this novel, the politics of the Cuban Revolution intrude upon mothering as mothers and children are physically and emotionally separated by political ideology and emigration. Martínez also wisely calls for sensibility and flexibility in twenty-first century discourse on Latina mothering as the Latino community comprises homosexual parents, single mothers, divorced and separated mothers, and foster and extended families to complicate the issue.

Petra Guerra, Diana I. Ríos, and D. Milton Stokes critique the soap opera genre in "The Telenovela *Alborada*: Constructions of the Latina Mother in an Internationally Successful Soap Opera." Traditional oppressive patriarchal systems are deconstructed and mothering stereotypes that support the "traditional illusion of domesticity" are debunked. The authors reiterate our need to revise the "fictional reality" of mothering provided by *telenovelas* to reflect the complicated lifestyles of real mothers.

The edition concludes with Cristina Herrera's illuminating essay on Mexican folklore, songs, and other oral traditions and their influence on Chicana mothering. "Chicana writers strive to create a complex rendering of the mother-daughter bond. Reclaiming the three mothers [la Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, and La Llorona] is a symbolic reclaiming of the maternal relationship" (226). The ongoing presence and influence of these mothers reflect ways in which religion, history, and legend merge and uniquely influence expectations of Mexican and Chicana motherhood.

Overall, the text is a valuable prism of Latina/Chicana mothering that can benefit educators, researchers, social workers, clergy, in effect anyone concerned

and involved with mothers and their priceless contributions to their families and communities. In addition, the anthology proves highly readable without excessive academic jargon, making it accessible to graduate and undergraduate students in any field of study and others interested in mothers and their crucial roles in society. Lastly, the anthology serves as a convincing call to action for further research on all aspects of mothering, especially in Latina/Chicana contexts.

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Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley. *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010, 274 pages.

In *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature*, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley reposes a question that Michelle Cliff once asked: What does it mean for a woman to love another woman in the Caribbean? The author begins by admitting that she has explored this question in depth and posed the question to countless women from Suriname to Brooklyn and still does not have a clear answer. *Thieving Sugar* is her attempt at clarifying what this love means through an exploration of selected Caribbean poetry and narratives, one that goes farther than the analysis of literary techniques. Tinsley delves into customs and *fete* accompanying these interactions as well as the lexicon and

Sargasso and Digital Access

The editors of *Sargasso* remind readers that past issues, including our 4-volume Caribe 2000 Series, are available online via dLOC, Digital Library of the Caribbean. For free, easy access visit:

<http://dloc.com/UF00096005/00011/allvolumes2?td=sargasso>

New issues are added two years following their publication as print volumes. The Digital Library of the Caribbean (www.dloc.com) is a cooperative digital library for resources from and about the Caribbean and circum-Caribbean. Administered by Florida International University, dLOC provides access to digitized versions of Caribbean cultural, historical, and research materials currently held in archives, libraries, and private collections.

In addition, *Sargasso's* website includes a special section featuring 24 interviews published between 1984 and 2010. Among these are dialogues with Rosario Ferré, George Lamming, Gordon K. Lewis, Edwidge Danticat, Derek Walcott, and Junot Díaz. These can be easily downloaded as individual pdf documents.

<http://humanidades.uprrp.edu/ingles/pubs/sargasso.htm>
