

## **Distribution Agreement**

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

---

Stephanie J. Alvarado

---

Date

**Approval Sheet**

Queer Latinx Feminist Futurism: F.K.A. Latina Reproductive Justice

By

Stephanie J. Alvarado

Master of Arts

Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

---

Pamela Scully, PhD  
Advisor

---

Kathleen Cleaver, JD  
Committee Member

---

Holloway Sparks, PhD  
Committee Member

Accepted:

---

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.  
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

Queer Latinx Feminist Futurism: F.K.A. Latina Reproductive Justice

By

Stephanie J. Alvarado

B.A., New York University, 2009

Advisor: Pamela Scully, Ph.D.

An abstract of a thesis submitted to the faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies  
of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

2014

## Abstract

Queer Latinx Feminist Futurism: F.K.A. Latina Reproductive Justice

By

Stephanie J. Alvarado

This year marks the twentieth anniversary since the coining of the term “reproductive justice” as a framework used to fight reproductive oppression. I argue that an impasse has been reached in labeling the current campaigns, strategies, and platforms that engage Latinas as “reproductive justice”. What is labeled as “reproductive justice” today is merely reproductive *reform*. “Reproductive Justice” has outgrown its radical origins and has been watered down by the limitations of the non-profit industrial complex and investments in neoliberal policy reform at the expense of queer undocumented immigrants. My experience organizing for reproductive justice with undocumented Latina immigrant women in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas is what brought me to this conclusion. I engage theories of Afrofuturism and mestiza consciousness as a way to argue that what was “Formerly Known As (F.K.A.) Latina Reproductive Justice”, must move towards what I call a “queer Latinx feminist futurism” approach that de-centers U.S. state and legal interventions and critically engages geopolitical borders as sites for transnational feminist. This approach to organizing is not invested in reifying essentialist definitions of “woman” “citizen” or “latinidad” via policy interventions. Rather a queer Latinx feminist futurism thrives in functioning as a subversive strategy outside of the state where reproductive oppression is combated transnationally beyond borders and inclusive of queer undocumented bodies.

Queer Latinx Feminist Futurism: F.K.A. Latina Reproductive Justice

By

Stephanie J. Alvarado

B.A., New York University, 2009

Advisor: Pamela Scully, PhD.

An abstract of a thesis submitted to the faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies  
of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

2014

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would have been impossible for me to complete this work without the encouragement, love, support, and guidance of a community of extraordinary magical people who, in small ways and large, collectively held me up and inspired me to bring this project into fruition.

I am eternally grateful to my brilliant mentors, Dr. Arlene Davila and Dr. Alondra Nelson, for their unwavering support and guidance since my undergraduate days at NYU. I would not be where I am today without their investment in my personal and professional growth. Thank you for seeing me and pushing me to be brave.

I am deeply grateful and fully aware that this project would not be a reality without the support and advocacy of my committee chair and adviser, Dr. Pamela Scully. I am also grateful to have had the honor and privilege to learn how to straddle the lines of scholarship and activism from the amazing, Kathleen Cleaver, JD, as my committee member and fellow revolutionary. A special thanks to my committee member, Dr. Holloway Sparks who was able to support me on such short notice to help me finish strong.

Immeasurable gratitude is due to the National Latina Institute of Reproductive Health and their bright leadership. Special shout out to Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, who has been my long time mentor and provided me with the opportunity to contribute to the amazing and necessary work of NLIRH. Special thank you to my team during my time at NLIRH: Maria Elena Perez, Veronica Bayetti-Flores, Rosario Quiroz, and Stephanie Rodriguez. Thank you for sharing your brilliance with me, for loving me, and for the countless laughs. To Lucy Felix and the fierce mujeres in the Rio Grande Valley, without you all I would not have any ground to stand on. Thank you for your passion, vision, and fearlessness.

I was fortunate enough to begin my graduate studies with the support of Berky Abreu, who passed away in April 2013. I remember when Berky sat me down and told me that I was the first Latina WGSS accepted into their program and that I had no choice but to finish, no matter what. I am eternally grateful for having known the magic that Berky is and will always carry her in my heart. I also would not have been able to survive this journey if it wasn't for the support and mentoring of my colleagues Dr. Moya Bailey, Dr. Whitney Peoples, Dr. Chanel Craft-Tanner, and Dr. Diana Louis. I was able to enter the academy because of the time you all invested in elevating and creating space for the works of women of color. I am indebted to all of you for sharing your time, wisdom, and brilliance with me. A big warm gratitude shout out to Rachel A. Dudley and Taina Figueroa for being the best friends I could ask for during my time at Emory. Meeting you both affirmed my existence in this space that makes aliens of us, but together we pushed through and stand in the light.

Any accomplishment I ever received would not be possible without the countless sacrifices and endless love of my mother, Angela Alvarado. The love and laughter of my sisters, Kayla Alvarado and Gabriela Alvarado sustained me throughout. The wisdom, strength, and grace of my grandmother, Requila Aguirre kept me grounded and focused. Collectively, their dedication and unconditional love inspire me to be resilient and brave. I thank Jardyn Lake for a love so pure and magical. There are no words to convey how rich my life is because of your wisdom, cheerleading, and sweetness.

## **Contents**

Introduction.....	1
Historicizing Latina Reproductive Justice .....	5
Uses of Latinas as the Bodies of Knowledge Production.....	11
Why The Rio Grande Valley?.....	22
NLIRH and TX LAN.....	25
Queer Latinx Feminist Futurism.....	31
Conclusion.....	35
Bibliography.....	37

“Afrofuturism is way of looking at the world...It’s even an epistemology that is really about thinking about the future, thinking about the subject position of Black people. And about how that is both alienating and about alienation. So that the alien becomes to figure quite centrally in Afrofuturism. The outsider figure. Its also about aspirations for modernity. About having a place in modernity. Its about speculation and utopia...Part of why its Afrofuturism in particular, is that part of the resilience of Black culture and Black life is about imagining the impossible, imagining a better place, a different world” – Dr. Alondra Nelson

“En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating new myths—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves and the ways we behave—la mestiza creates new consciousness” –Gloria Anzaldua

## **Introduction:**

### F.K.A. Latina Reproductive Justice

*The Bonham Daily Favorite* headline for its October 30, 1997 newspaper was “Cut Rate Abortion Kills Texas Woman: Four Others Seriously Injured”. Her name was Rosie Jimenez. On October 3, 1977 she died in McAllen, Texas of an illegal abortion. Rosie Jimenez became the first woman known to die because of the Hyde Amendment, which prohibited Medicaid from paying for abortions. Rosie needed an abortion but could not afford it in the USA, so she crossed the border at Reynosa, Texas, to get her abortion in Mexico, which ultimately cost her life. Rosie was a Latina, working class, college student, single mother whose only insurance was Medicaid. The Centers for Disease Control reported that Rosie was one of five women who crossed the border at Reynosa to seek abortions in Mexico. All five women suffered sepsis, extreme vaginal bleeding, and pelvic infections, but Rosie was the only one who died.

The Rio Grande Valley in Texas has historically been a site of contention and contradiction involving struggles for reproductive justice in the Latino community. The Rio Grande Valley is a region that the United States has colonized since the 19th century. The relationship between Mexico and the US illustrates the relationship between gender, sexuality,



reproduction and citizenship. Where is Rosie Jimenez in the histories of reproductive freedom? What does it mean that the first person to die after the Hyde Amendment was enacted was a Latina? How we tell the story of the struggle for reproductive justice is important for remembering that history is not static and can be rewritten to reflect contemporary challenges. That history should include women like Rosie who died a completely preventable death if the interests of low-income women of color had been the center of policy making at the time. It is for women like Rosie that I am invested in fighting for reproductive justice. Rosie's story also demonstrates the importance of the Rio Grande in challenging the present narrative of reproductive justice, which places the US as the central framework for Latinx communities. The relationship between the US and Mexico cannot be eclipsed in this story.

The legacy of Rosie Jimenez dying in vain still haunts the reproductive justice movement. What does it mean that this woman was from the RGV, the same place that now has zero abortion providers? Today there are thousands of Latinxs just like Rosie who are desperate enough to seek abortions at the risk of losing their life by crossing the U.S./ Mexico border. Despite this reality, today's reproductive justice movement does not reflect the geopolitical tensions that exist on the U.S./Mexico border when it comes accessing reproductive health care services. No transnational analysis or strategy in the Latina reproductive justice movement addresses how undocumented immigrant women obtain reproductive health care services by any means necessary, including crossing the Mexican border to obtain contraception or abortions. Instead, the focus has shifted to support neoliberal policies and legal interventions that uphold the status quo, rather than seeking to transform it to meet the needs of those who remain most vulnerable in accessing reproductive health care.

In 2005, Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ) published their groundbreaking article “A New Vision for Advancing Our Movement for Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights, and Reproductive Justice”. The authors outline and define the language, framework, and strategy differences between reproductive health, rights, and justice movements for combating reproductive oppression. They define reproductive oppression as “the regulation of reproduction and exploitation of women’s bodies and labor as both a tool and a result of systems of oppression based on race, class, gender, and sexuality, ability, age and immigration status” (1). ACRJ situates the reproductive justice framework in order to address the gaps in reproductive rights and health movements that historically have focused on legal interventions and service provision, without providing an analysis that addresses reproductive oppression as “a result of the intersection of multiple oppressions and is inherently connected to the struggle for social justice and human rights” (1). Reproductive justice is explained as a framework that is needed *in addition to* the reproductive health and reproductive rights frameworks, to combat reproductive oppression. According to ACRJ, reproductive justice is:

the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being of women and girls, and will be achieved when women and girls have the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, sexuality and reproduction for ourselves, our families and our communities in all areas of our lives (1).

ACRJ states that in November 1994, a Black womens caucus named “Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice” at the Illinois Pro-Choice Alliance Conference first coined the term “reproductive justice” in response to the white mainstream reproductive rights organizations that were neither engaging nor supporting the struggles of women of color beyond issues pertaining to abortion (5).

The “reproductive justice” framework was intended to advance gains in reproductive freedom for women of color, by women of color. In fact, I believe an impasse has been reached by continuing to label the current campaigns, strategies, and platforms that engage women of color as “reproductive justice.” “Reproductive Justice” has outgrown its origins. What today is labeled “reproductive justice” is merely reproductive *reform*. It is time to call things what they are if we are to envision what reproductive freedom can be.

I argue that what was “Formerly Known As (F.K.A.) Latina Reproductive Justice” must move towards what I call a “queer Latinx feminist futurism” in order to fight reproductive oppression beyond contemporary sociopolitical constructs of bodies, borders, nationhood, and citizenship. I choose to use the word “Latinx” instead of “Latina/o” or “Latina” or “Latin@” to symbolize and include gender nonconforming Latinxs, to challenge gender binaries, and to queer myths about a unified homogenous Latinidad and challenge conventional identity politics. The term “Latinx” is used as a linguistic political intervention to create space for nonbinary, gender queer, gender nonconforming Latinxs. I have mostly seen this term used in online organizing spaces and tumblr blogs like “this in not latinx” and “we are all mixed up” that critically engage Latinidad to include queers, undocumented folks, and combat anti-blackness in Latinx communities.

In *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces (2003)* Juana Maria Rodriguez states that, “latinidad serves to define a particular geopolitical experience but it 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” (10). Rodriguez also points out that, “In Spanish, there is no direct translation for queer... This breaking down of categories, questioning definitions and giving them new meaning, moving through spaces of

understanding and dissention, working through the critical practice of ‘refusing explication’ is precisely what queerness entails” (24). In other words, to queer latinidad means to call into question systems of categorization and to open new possibilities where theory and praxis can meet in imagining a queer latinx feminist futurity.

In thinking about ways to theorize about futurity, I draw from an interview entitled “Afrofuturism” (2010) with Dr. Alondra Nelson who explains Afrofuturism as:

way of looking at the world...It’s even an epistemology that is really about thinking about the future, thinking about the subject position of Black people. And about how that is both alienating and about alienation. So that the alien becomes to figure quite centrally in Afrofuturism. The outsider figure. Its also about aspirations for modernity. About having a place in modernity. Its about speculation and utopia...Part of why its Afrofuturism in particular, is that part of the resilience of Black culture and Black life is about imagining the impossible, imagining a better place, a different world

What the Latinx reproductive justice movement can gain from xxx the afrofuturistic approach is the value of investing energy into thinking beyond reactionary strategies that fit current systems and structures and instead to imagine a movement that decolonizes and deconstructs state and legal interventions. Afrofuturism does not shy away from imagining the impossible or centering “the alien” as an outsider figure to imagine a different world. Alien figures are also present in the Latinx reproductive justice movement, in the form of undocumented immigrant bodies often called “illegal aliens” in xenophobic discourse. Centering the “alien figure” can innovate and inform the ways Latinx reproductive justice movements engage undocumented immigrant women in the struggle for reproductive freedom.

### **Historicizing Latina Reproductive Justice**

What will the legacy be of the Latinxs who fought for reproductive freedom? How do we remember those who have come before us? Why do we need to remember? In the tradition of Latina and Chicana feminist thought, the use of testimonios and story telling become the vessels

that hold the language of liberation as told through our own personal experiences. I am aware that my account of my own reproductive justice organizing work exists within a historical academic cannon that includes renowned monographs that have taken up the task of documenting reproductive justice movements. It is my hope to build upon and contribute to what has already been written about reproductive justice in order to envision a future movement--- one that transcends legal intervention and not for profit organizational structures--- to fight against reproductive oppression.

In *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement (2003)* Jennifer Nelson recounts the struggle for legal abortion and reproductive rights in the 1960s, 1970s, and the early 1980s. Nelson argues that feminism was central to developing reproductive rights discourse that began with the single issue focus on legal abortion and culminates in a broad multi issue-based grassroots movement to gain the right to not only terminate pregnancy, but also the right to parent for all women regardless of economic status, race, or sexual identity (2).

Nelson draws upon the ways that women in the Young Lords Party were able to generate a more complex reproductive rights narrative “that acknowledged that different women had varying reproductive experiences, in part, depending on their race and class position. These particular experiences constituted the need for different demands in a reproductive rights movement” (4). The Young Lords Party led the pro-fertility control position that developed as a result of the actions of a few outspoken and powerful women within the organization who incorporated feminist thought into their work. These women ensured that feminist demands for safe, legal contraception, abortion, and other reproductive rights became an integral part of the Young Lords’ politics (114). Women in the Young Lord’s Party developed a creative political framework to account for race, class, and gender oppression to frame an inclusive reproductive

rights policy that reflected the needs of women of different identity positions. The Young Lords Party paved the way in the early 1970s for demanding “both an end to sterilization abuse and a right to abortion and contraception on demand” within an organization whose politics grew from both nationalist and feminist roots (115). By the middle of the 1970s, socialist feminists—most notably feminists organized into the Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA)—adopted much of the Young Lord’s Party politics of reproductive freedom in their own approaches.

In *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice (2004)*, Jael Silliman, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross, and Elena Gutierrez trace the histories of reproductive rights organizations formed by women of color in the 1980s and 1990s. The “stories of activism, courage, and determination...challenge the common belief that communities who have suffered the most from restrictions on reproductive rights do not organize on their own behalf. This book retrieves part of that history by documenting the reproductive rights activism of eight women of color groups in the United States” (1). The authors provide a series of case studies that document the ways women of color have led the fight for reproductive freedom and have organized to shift the conversation away from individualistic approaches to an intersectional community-based approach to reproductive justice.

Elena Gutierrez’s chapter entitled “We Will No Longer Be Silent or Invisible: Latinas Organizing for Reproductive Justice” not only traces the history of reproductive oppression in the Latina community starting with the colonial legacy of Puerto Rico, but also illustrates the ways in which Latinas have organized and fought back. Attention to sexual deviance and reproduction were always part of the legacy between the U.S. and Puerto Rico since its annexation and before it reached the mainland: “In 1898, following the Spanish-American War,

the US claimed Puerto Rico as a territory. Since then, reproductive and other social experiments on the island were fundamental to the relationship between the US and Puerto Rico” (219).

Gutierrez argues that Puerto Rico and its people have always been vulnerable to US experimentation, specifically for American birth control policies and products. The colonial domination of Puerto Rico by the US facilitates this even more as Puerto Rican women were perceived as primitive and hypersexual, in dire need for control in the eyes of eugenicists:

The contraceptive foam, the intrauterine device (IUD), and many varieties of the pill were all tested on the bodies of Puerto Rican women before ever making their way to the mainland US market. When laws against birth control prevented medical trials of the contraceptive pill on the mainland US during the 1950s, pharmaceutical companies conducted field trials in Puerto Rico (220)

Gutierrez illustrates the ways the bodies of Puerto Rican women serve as not only grounds for experimentation, but also forms of population control and abuse. Since 1937, sterilization was the only form of birth control available in Puerto Rico as a way to address “overpopulation.”

Gutierrez asserts: “because sterilization was available in Puerto Rico and not the United States, Puerto Rican women provided an opportunity for surgeons to practice and refine the technology before it was marketed in the US” (220). It is clear that the colonial status of Puerto Rico legitimized the development of sterilization as a reproductive technology and practice. Operation Bootstrap was a program to boost the Puerto Rican economy and it encouraged Puerto Rican women to become sterilized as an incentive for participating in the workforce. Sterilization became the number one form of birth control in Puerto Rico, as no other options were available and women were given the false impression that it was reversible. By 1965 approximately 35% of Puerto Rican women has been sterilized, two-thirds of them in their twenties (221). The lack of accurate information on sterilization, the lack of reproductive health care options, and coerced sterilization procedures in Puerto Rico

illustrate how important differences exist in the historical narratives on sterilization along lines of race, ethnicity, and gender.

Gutierrez also continues the historical narrative of Latinas fighting back against sterilization by dating their resistance as part of the social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Gutierrez notes that during this period Latina activism occurred within and outside of Latino Nationalist and mainstream women's rights organizations, both of which marginalized the needs of women of color (223). Moreover, Gutierrez cites the diverging political stances of Latino Nationalist organizations, as a way to illustrate that there is no sweeping statements for Latinxs views of issues of reproductive oppression. She notes, "[h]owever, while Chicano and Puerto Rican Nationalists denounced the abuses that occurred, they ultimately adopted differing stances toward abortion" (223). The Young Lords Party opened community run clinics that offered a broad range of birth control options including abortion while the Brown Berets, a Chicano Nationalists, were adamantly against it.

Gutierrez also sites the founding of The Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CESA) in 1974 as a moment in history where women of color were organizing to fight back against sterilization abuse and reproductive oppression. This group was a multi ethnic coalition that included "the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, The Puerto Rican Socialist Party, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Marxist Education Collective, and the Committee for Decolonization of Puerto Rico" but Latinas were crucial to its success (226). As a result of the organizing work on behalf of CESA sterilization guidelines for New York State were developed and implemented and went on to set the precedent for other states to follow. Gutierrez goes on to name organizations that emerged from the 1980s to the present that continue to do this work but not without emphasizing that individual Latinas had been involved in the struggle for



reproductive freedom before coming to together at an organizational level. Some of the influential organizations that Gutierrez cites are The Latina Roundtable on Health and Reproductive Rights established in 1989, Amigas Latinas en Accion established in the 1990s, and lastly the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health founded in 1994 which is the only national organization dedicated to Latina reproductive health still in existence today.

Andrea Smith's "Beyond Pro-Choice versus Pro-Life: Women of Color and Reproductive Justice" (2005) calls for a more radical vision of reproductive freedom. Smith argues that the pro-choice versus pro-life framework inherently marginalizes women of color, Native women, poor women, women with disabilities, and women from other marginalized communities by its investment in masking the structures of white supremacy and capitalism that undergird the reproductive choices that women can make (119). Smith takes up the pro-life and pro-choice frameworks as points of departure to illustrate how they need to be pushed beyond their boundaries to truly reflect all women's experiences --not merely those of the white upper middle class. Smith draws on Rickie Solinger's *Beggars and Choosers* (2001) to argue that during the 1960s and 1970s abortion rights advocates were actually operating from a "rights" based framework, that worked to benefit all women regardless of their individual access to resources. This is significant, in contrast to the choice based framework that now dominates the reproductive rights discourse. The concept of choice is connected to having individual access to quality resources as a health care consumer, therefore creating a hierarchal relationship among women based on who is capable of realizing said choice. As Solinger states:

"Choice" also became a symbol of middle-class women's arrival as independent consumers. Middle-class women could afford to choose. They had earned the right to choose motherhood, if they liked. According to many Americans, however, when choice was associated with poor women, it became a symbol of illegitimacy. Poor women had not earned the right to choose. (2001, 199-200)

Smith builds on Solinger's analysis by arguing that women are viewed as having reproductive choices only if they can afford and access them on their own, and only then can they be recognized as legitimate in making their choice. Ultimately what Smith adds to the narratives of Gutierrez et al, Nelson, and Roberts is a reproductive justice agenda that makes the dismantling of capitalism, white supremacy, and colonialism central, and not just as principles to tack on to organizations' promotional material designed to appeal to women of color, but without any budget to support making these principles a reality (135).

This brief history of Latinx reproductive justice demonstrates the ways in which Latinxs bodies have long been open to experimentation, criminalization, and surveillance under the guise of public health interventions, specifically regarding their reproduction. It is clear that the ability of Latinxs to reproduce and exercise autonomy over our own bodies has been challenged by state sanctioned efforts led by public health institutions to enforce eugenic policies like population control. The history of public health as a U.S. military intervention project becomes evident when analyzing how the Latinx body becomes a site for colonial conquest via reproductive oppression as a basis for scientific knowledge production.

### **Uses of Latinas as the Bodies of Knowledge Production**

In Dorothy Roberts' seminal book *Killing the Black Body (1997)*, she historicizes the ways public and scholarly debates about reproductive freedom had too often been centered on abortion at the expense of ignoring other important reproductive health policies that were most likely to affect women of color. Roberts fills in the historical gaps that overlook the importance of racism in shaping our understanding of reproductive liberty and the degree of "choice" that women of color really had in order to fulfill our reproductive freedom (5). The connection

between race, reproduction, and science is crucial to understanding the ways in which the bodies of Latinxs are used as sites of scientific knowledge production.

For example, sterilization abuse of women of color in the US was the primary tool for eugenicists to police reproduction of women of color in order to maintain the white US national identity and racial order. Mass coercive sterilizations were done so often in US colonies like Puerto Rico, that Puerto Rican women colloquially referred to getting sterilized as “la operacion” (“the operation”). The effects of these mass sterilizations were heinous: “The island wide sterilization campaign was so successful that by 1968 more than one-third of the women of childbearing age in Puerto Rico had been sterilized, the highest percentage in the world at that time” (94). Sterilization abuse was a form of population control based on eugenic principles that deemed Puerto Rican women as hypersexual, uncivilized, and unfit to parent. Sterilization abuse of women of color in the US was a primary tool for eugenicists to police reproduction of women of color in order to maintain a white US national identity and racial order.

The first time that Latinxs were actually considered as an ethnicity added to a person’s race was in the 1980 census, “People were supposed to select both whether or not they are ethnically Hispanic or Latino and also which they belong to. So someone might be a white Hispanic, a black Hispanic, an American Indian Hispanic, and so forth” (21). These categorizations proved to be inaccurate according to the ways Latinxs viewed their own identities as, “almost half of them declined to select white, black, American Indian, Asian, or Pacific Islander in the 2000 census race question and chose “some other race” instead” reflecting the ineffectiveness and short comings of applying racial categories to Latinx identities and the assumption that it is possible to do so (21). Despite the obvious shortcomings of trying to

homogenize Latinxs into precise racial categories, the racialization of Latinxs remains evident through the xenophobic discourse that criminalizes Latina reproduction as a direct threat to US national identity.

The history of forced sterilization as a form of reproductive oppression demonstrates the central role bodies of women of color played in scientific knowledge production. The coproduction of scientific knowledge rests on the bodies of women of color and thus requires us to revisit understandings of racial oppression and its relationship to reproductive freedom. The ways racial categories functioned in the Latinx community demonstrates the way bodies are racialized in order to implement regulation and policing of reproduction.

Roberts continues to examine the relationships between race, science, and reproduction in *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-First Century* (2011). Roberts historicizes the intersections between race, science, and reproduction in the US by exploring the ways that race is constructed as a political system that is validated through genomic science and technologies (xii). Roberts views race as a “political system that governs people by sorting them into social grouping based on invented biological demarcations” which ultimately makes it so that race is read as biological category for people instead of interpreting the very idea of categorization of people into distinct hierarchical groups as a political process (4). One of the ways Roberts illustrates how race is politically categorized is through examining the ways scientists created a racial order over time:

Every modern era has had a science of race. Scientists were instrumental in inventing the concept of biological races, in specifying their demarcations, and in justifying the social inequities between them. Scientists created the classification systems that placed human beings in distinct racial categories. Scientists made race seem like a natural condition they had discovered about human beings rather than a system of governance imposed on human beings (27).

Roberts' attention to the ways scientists have shaped narratives of race across time is central to understanding the relationship between race, science, and reproductive oppression. The bodies of women of color were used as grounds for experimentation for scientific knowledge production and reifying racial difference. Roberts traces a history that reveals the ways scientists have continually engaged and legitimized a biological understanding of race throughout the scientific and political upheavals of the last three centuries (28). What this account suggests is that the latest incarnation of genomic science should be scrutinized as such and not deemed any better than past scientific endeavors that constructed race and reifying race as a biological category.

Roberts also illustrates how race has informed the construction of citizenship in the United States, "Citizenship is a political category, not a biological one. Citizenship doesn't describe a person's intrinsic characteristics; it defines her relationship to a nation's government, to the other people who are citizens, and to noncitizens" (4). The creation of citizenship as a civilizing project and specifically, the notion of biocitizenship is a historical marker that affects the bodies of women of color disproportionately through government regulation of reproduction. Roberts uses examples of how United States immigration law functions to police national borders to bar groups of people from entering the country based on racial categories. Robert's analysis of interpreting race as a political system through biological arguments of racial hierarchy that favors proximity to whiteness locates the construction of race as a tool of science.

Roberts demonstrates how eugenicists favored the proximity to whiteness in order to be eligible for entry to the US and consequently, attain US citizenship "The eugenicists advocated the rational control of reproduction in order to improve society's mental, moral, and physical

health through selective breeding. In reality, eugenics enforced social judgments about race, class, and gender cloaked in scientific terms” (36) and in effect “turned biological theory into public policy” (39). The creation of a racial hierarchy based in biology is what is at the core of eugenic ideology that dominated US social policy formation up until the 1940s and was the basis and political tool to define and maintain a white US national identity. Additionally, it is important to state that US immigration law from the time of the constitution has been a racist project, in fact only whites could become nationalized citizens until after the 14th amendment that established birth right citizenship for everyone and the result of the Civil War made it necessary to grant African descended people and mixed race people citizens under the 14th amendment of 1868.

Roberts extends this argument by stating “Americans are accepting a genetic ideology rooted in race that makes everyone responsible for managing their own lives at the genetic level instead of eliminating the social inequalities that damage our entire society” (310) and that ultimately what is created is an expectation where “all Americans are increasingly expected to become biocitizens who assume full responsibility for their own welfare through the self regulation of genetic risk, consumption of gene based goods and services, and donations of their genetic information to scientific research“(310). The promotion of biocitizenship facilitates a “shift of responsibility for public welfare from the state to the market and individual ... making racial inequities seem like biological rather than social problems” (302). The creation of citizenship and specifically, the notion biocitizenship, affects Latinx immigrants disproportionately through the criminalization and reproductive oppression of Latinx bodies.

The policing of Latinx reproduction is connected to the way Latinx immigrants are racialized and policed through “genetic surveillance” as a way to preserve and protect US

national identity at the intersection of US immigration law and eugenic ideologies. Current immigration laws like Secure Communities and Arizona's SB 1070 serve as examples of the policing of Latinx reproductive freedom that have disproportionately impacted the Latinx immigrant community through increased policing and racializing of Latinx immigrant bodies.

How the U.S. enforces its immigration policies reflects the relationship Latinx immigrants have to the state. The failure of Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform has resulted in individual states taking on the issue of regulating immigration individually. This has resulted in the conflation of federal and state government jurisdictions where states now have the capacity to regulate certain immigration matters on their own terms. This practice demonstrates what Roberts calls "genetic surveillance" based on DNA collected from arrests on a federal level that are now accessible to local law enforcement and have disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx communities:

Because of the rampant racial bias in arrests and convictions, the government DNA databases being amassed nationwide effectively constitute another race-based technology emerging from genetic science... They signal the potential use of genetic technologies to reinforce the racial order not only by incorporating a biological definition of race but also by imposing genetic regulation on the basis of race (264-265)

Recent federal legislation has led to the rampant use of DNA databases. For example in 1994, the DNA Identification Act and the Crime Identification Technology Act provided funding for law enforcement agencies to amass DNA into a giant federal repository, the FBI's Combined DNA Index Systems (CODIS). In 2005 the DNA Fingerprint Act authorizes US agents to take and store DNA from anyone they arrest or detain and permits CODIS to retain profiles from arrestees submitted by the states that collected their DNA (266). Through formalizing the relationship between federal and local law enforcement, federal and state databases are a source for matching

DNA evidence to suspects at the local, state, and national levels (265). This regulation does not only apply to US citizens, but also to immigrants who are suspected to be undocumented

A controversial Arizona law signed by Governor Jan Brewer in April 2010, giving police broad authority to detain anyone suspected of being in the country illegally, is held up as a model for immigration enforcement policy in other states. When combined with congressional authorization of DNA sampling from all federal detainees, these immigration laws will cause the number of Latino profiles in state and the CODIS system to skyrocket (278)

This results in legalizing racial profiling that disproportionately impacts and criminalizes Latinxs. Laws like Arizona's SB 1070 have spread terror. Other states drafted copycat laws with the same xenophobic and racial profiling language targeting Latinx immigrants resulting in hyper vigilance and policing of Latinx communities, making many Latinxs fearful of deportation and family separation.

Though no comprehensive immigration reform bill has been passed, legislation that provides temporary fixes to the "broken immigration system" like Secure Communities, a deportation program using biometric technology using fingerprints to identify those covered. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) collaborates with the FBI, capitalizing on the FBI and local law enforcement, to detain and deport undocumented immigrants. Local authorities run fingerprints against federal immigration and criminal databases for every person booked into jail.

In October 2011, The Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy at UC Berkeley released a report called *Secure Communities by the Numbers: An Analysis of Demographics and Due Process*, where it "attempts to better understand the profile of individuals who have been apprehended through Secure Communities and the process they have encountered as they are funneled through the system". The report found that "individuals are pushed through rapidly, without appropriate checks or opportunities to challenge their detention



and/or deportation” (2). Secure communities, first introduced by the Bush Administration in 2008, has been greatly expanded in the Obama Administration, resulting in a 400% increase in deportations since 1996, and over one million deportations and counting since the Obama Administration took office (1). Biometric surveillance is apparent in enforcing Secure Communities through the collection and forwarding of fingerprints from local law enforcement arrests to the Department of Homeland Security where they are checked against the Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT) to determine if individuals qualify for deportation (2).

The report’s findings show that Latinxs are reported to “comprise 93% of individuals arrested through Secure communities though they only comprise 77% of the undocumented population in the United States”(2). This statistic is a powerful illustration of the hyper vigilance and targeting of Latinx immigrant bodies as a site for policing based on the racial profiling of Latinxs in the name of xenophobic national security measures. States are not allowed to opt out of Secure Communities, despite protests, thus creating a mandate for the perpetual usage of biometric technology that disproportionately criminalizes Latinx immigrant bodies. Xenophobic policies like Secure Communities perpetuates a discourse that racializes immigration law enforcement using biological justification, acknowledging a social bias.

In *Civilizing Natures (2004)*, Kavita Phillips explores the ways that “scientific and nonscientific spheres ideologically constitute each other”(196) to create an understanding that “[t]hough valuable, the insight that science is socially constructed must be complemented with an examination of the historical specificities of the categories through which we understand the social” (196). To add to this point, Phillips calls for “attention to processes of representation, the production of ideology, hegemony, the relations between domination of groups and the production of knowledge about them, and the institutionalization of unequal power relations” (9).

As reflected by immigration laws like Arizona's SB1070 and Secure Communities, it is clear that immigrant bodies are identified and read as threats to national security. Discourses surrounding the policing of Latinx immigrants have increasingly grown to perpetuate xenophobic trends in US culture that has targeted the reproductive freedom of immigrant Latinxs.

The growing sense of threat from Latinx reproduction has caused far right conservatives to rally around ending birthright citizenship. They have proposed legislation to limit the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which grants automatic citizenship to anyone born in the United States. The proposed Birthright Citizenship Act of 2011 seeks to strip citizenship from children born in the US to undocumented women by denying birthright citizenship to children who do not have one parent who can prove that he or she is a US citizen, lawful permanent resident, or serving in the US armed forces. Efforts to end birthright citizenship work in tandem with xenophobic narratives that criminalize Latinx immigrant reproduction by deeming it uncontrollable and posing a threat to US national border security. The racist slur "anchor baby" has permeated US political discourses relying on xenophobic narratives about Latinx immigrants and their supposed quests for US citizenship via giving birth on US territory. As a result, hyper vigilance and policing on the U.S./Mexico border is equated to national security threat that has to be controlled severely to prevent an invasion of bodies who threaten to US national identity.

For an immigrant to become a naturalized citizen there are many requirements including a series of mandatory vaccinations. In an article titled *Eliminating HPV Vaccine Mandate For Immigrant Women: A Victory On the Road To Reproductive Justice*, Miriam Yeung and Amanda Allen describe the victory of removing the HPV vaccine as mandatory for all immigrant women who apply for green cards and immigrants applying to become US citizens. This requirement

was the result of a 1996 change made to immigration law that require all persons seeking to adjust their status to legal permanent resident in the U.S., or applying for immigrant visas to enter the U.S, be immunized against “vaccine-preventable diseases” recommended by an advisory committee at the Center for Disease Control (Yeung, Allen). The requirement for attaining the Gardasil vaccines applies to immigrant women in order to become US citizens proved to be problematic, given that Gardasil is not a mandatory vaccine for US citizens, thus creating a double standard between US citizens vs immigrant women. Specifically making a vaccine that treats HPV, a sexually transmitted infection, mandatory for immigrant women fed into the narratives that Latinx immigrant women are hypersexual and have uncontrollable reproduction that must be policed. This explicit example illustrates the way that the US national identity is constructed in relation to immigrant women, where certain vaccinations are required of immigrant women and not US citizen women, suggesting that immigrant women need to be cleansed prior to entering US territory to ensure the safety of US citizens.

In 2011, an unprecedented number of anti-abortion policies were introduced to Congress, some of which were passed creating a hostile environment that reproductive rights, health, and justice advocates called “The War on Women”. One of the tactics that conservatives used to help spread “The War on Women” was through using anti-abortion billboards targeting communities of color. These billboards were strategically placed in communities of color with messages stating, “The most dangerous place for a Latino/African-American is in the womb” or “Black/Latino children are an endangered species” as a way to garner support from communities of color to repeal Roe vs Wade and/or drastically limit abortion access. Though these billboards are meant to criminalize abortion while trying to “save the babies” of color, the message ends up being one that insults women of color by implying that they are a danger to their own children.

Legislation like HR 3541 originally titled the “Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act” (PRENDA), misappropriates the names of civil rights heroes in an attempt to disguise the paternalistic and deeply racist assumptions that pervade this bill. PRENDA picks up where the now-infamous “billboard campaigns” left off contributing to narratives that continue to insult and attack the reproductive freedom of Latinas. PRENDA claims to target a social ill: the continued undervaluing of women and people of color. But in reality, the bill takes aim at a social good: a woman’s access to reproductive healthcare. This legislation intends to ban “race and sex selective” abortion, but in fact, it would limit women’s access to safe abortion care, punish providers for a woman’s perceived motivations, and perpetuate harmful stereotypes about women and people of color.

This legislative discourse is not different to the eugenic policies of early US immigration laws that open up the bodies of women of color to political scrutiny and control because we are not trusted to make decisions on our own. The discourse of the “anchor baby” and “dangerous Latina womb” are constructed to inform the public policy that determines which bodies in the US are considered to be valuable trusted citizens and which are not included or welcomed to be US citizens. Thus, Latinx reproductive freedom serves as a site of contention that co-constitutes the construction of the desired US citizen based on “biological” race categories that continue to target and criminalize Latinx reproduction across national borders.

Hyper vigilance and policing exist in Latinx immigrant communities today as a way to preserve the US citizenship status quo and its favoring proximity to whiteness, specifically by marking Latinx reproduction a dangerous threat. The residue of eugenic social policy is evident in immigration laws, policies limiting reproductive rights, and the racializing of Latinx immigrant bodies as a way to combat Latin American migration into the US in order to preserve

a desired form of citizenship. Reproductive activism has tried to take this context into account. I discuss my work in the Rio Grande Valley to further argue for a new theory of reproductive justice: Queer Latinx Feminist Futurism.

### **Why the Rio Grande Valley?**

As we have seen, the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) has historically been central to the struggle for reproductive freedom and immigrant rights in Latinx immigrant communities. When I think about the first time I visited the colonias in the RGV, I go to a place of resistance and resilience, not victimhood. It is easy to romanticize community organizing and activism when it comes to this geographic region because of the reliance and fierceness of the Latinx immigrant women who are leading the fight for reproductive justice. One can also describe the The Rio Grande Valley as the area, that is the most deprived of women's health care services and most policed when it comes to immigration law enforcement. Latinx immigrant women are at the forefront of the fight for reproductive justice in this region, despite the majority of them being undocumented.

The constant policing and criminalizing of Latinx immigrant communities in the U.S./Mexico borderlands are not met without resistance or fighting back. The Texas Latina Advocacy Network in the Rio Grande Valley is the most organized and mobilized. Among the networks I helped organized while at NLIRH. The TX LAN was conducting transnational organizing approaches to maintain a growing base of activists in the colonias in order to sustain a fast growing base by crossing the border to Mexico to print flyers, screen t-shirts, buy giveaways for community meetings etc. Crossing the border to Mexico became part of the field visits I would take twice a year to evaluate the network's growth and necessities. During a field visit I took in October 2010, I crossed the Mexican border to buy birth control with three activists and

another NLIRH staff person. Crossing borders to access contraception was what we were doing to support women who did not have the means to access contraception on their own, including myself.

After Health Care Reform passed, birth control became free if you had insurance but that was about all the good news that turned out for reproductive rights policies. As of today, Texas has 7 abortion clinics in the entire state due to cuts to women's health services put into action this month. The Rio Grande Valley, Texas has zero clinics. This includes the 7 counties that are in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. For undocumented Latinx immigrant women living in the Rio Grande Valley crossing an inland border patrol checkpoint to get an abortion now means risking deportation. Two years ago, 41 abortion clinics operated in Texas, including four which were accessible without crossing an inland checkpoint. But after restrictions passed by a Republican-led legislature were enacted, only eight clinics remain in the whole state and none fall below the wall of checkpoints (Boonstra).

In Texas, the right to abortion is in the hands of a state that does not acknowledge undocumented Latinx immigrant women as people, nor where they live on an electoral map. What does a 'right' mean to someone who is not legible by the state? What does a paper right mean when Latinxs immigrant women cannot access services due to their citizenship status? What does the law mean in a place that is unincorporated and that state elected officials do not even recognize as their constituency? What does it mean to live on the borderlands and have to negotiate the politics of borders and colonial history that creates nations out of the bodies of colonized, migrant, enslaved, and native peoples?

The Rio Grande Valley is also the place where renowned queer Chicana feminist scholar activist Gloria Anzaldua was born and raised. In her essay “La conciencia de la mestiza:

Towards a New Consciousness” Anzaldua reflects on The Valley:

Tierra natal. This is home...en las colonias on the other side of the tracks...Some of the poorest people in the U.S. live in the Lower Rio Grande Valley...this land has survived possession and ill-use by five countries: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederacy, and the U.S. again. It has survived Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, pillage. Today I see the Valley still struggling to survive (388).

Gloria Anzaldúa’s foundational text *Borderlands: La Frontera The New Mestiza* (1987) is central to the development of Chicana feminist thought and useful for thinking through the geopolitical spaces of the Valley. Anzaldúa’s theory of the Borderlands/La Frontera, “represents a concept that draws from yet goes beyond the geopolitical Texas/Mexico borderlands to encompass psychic yet also potentially transformational spaces where opposites converge, conflict, and transform” (319). Her project is in part to (re)write Chicana history, through the use of myth, tradition, oral histories, historical “facts,” and personal accounts, Anzaldúa formulates what she calls “autohistoria.” *Borderlands/La Frontera* resists static ideas about genre by shifting from Mexico-tejana History, to personal testimonial, the text moves restlessly onward to a history of a larger political family.

Through her use of multiple languages, mestiza consciousness, testimonio, and resistance to objectivity she produces a framework to define what Chicana scholarship might look like.

Anzaldúa uses language in politically charged and creative ways. Anzaldúa notes, “the switching of “codes” in this book from English to Castillian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these, reflects my language, a new language—the language of the Borderlands”(20). By using the multiple languages found within the borderlands, Anzaldúa brings an often-marginalized identity to the center. Language is a

central theme to the development of Chicana feminist thought that is coupled with living life at the borderlands. Language is constantly changing and living along side people and its usage morphs into the political temporality of those speaking, writing, and living. Language becomes resistance to the silencing experienced in the margins. Anzaldúa powerfully states, “Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out” (54).

Anzaldúa’s theorizing of the borderlands speaks to the importance of this region as it relates to cultural memory and experiences of queer immigrant women in this area. It speaks to the transience and impermanence of the region. It speaks to the ways in which colonization formed the identities and geopolitics of the region. It speaks to the history of how the bodies of Latinx were integral to the colonial project of the U.S. through positing the Latinx body is always already ripe for colonization, hypersexualization, and conquest.

### **NLIRH and the Texas Latina Advocacy Network**

As stated on their organization website, [www.latinainstitute.org](http://www.latinainstitute.org), The National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health was founded in 1994. The organization started off as, the Latina Initiative, five years earlier under the auspices of Catholics for a Free Choice. The Latina Initiative was created in direct response to the lack of Latina visibility on reproductive rights and health issues. After a successful five year track record at Catholics for Free Choice, the Latina Initiative was renamed NLIRH and opened its doors as the first independent national organization and voice for Latinas on health and reproductive rights issues. In 2003 NLIRH reopened its doors in Brooklyn, NY. To this day, NLIRH is the only national Latina health and reproductive rights organization.



I first learned about the reproductive justice framework while interning at NLIRH in June 2008 doing reproductive health policy research around teen pregnancy prevention. Interning with NLIRH helped expand and strengthen my own politicization as a young person passionate about community organizing and social justice. In my capacity as National Field Organizer I was responsible for identifying, developing, and engaging Latinx leadership throughout the country. I organized Latina Advocacy Networks in PA, DC, FL, MN, WI, IL, NY, NJ, and TX. I was one of two Latinas in the Community Mobilization department. Together we traveled to key states where there were strong and growing numbers of Latinxs present. We would develop relationships with community based organizations that worked with Latinxs but were missing an advocacy based, gendered, reproductive justice approach. We provided resources for child care, food, and advocacy trainings. The community-based organizations conducted outreach for the trainings with the hopes of establishing a network of Latina advocates in the region. We provided technical assistance for their work and connected them to national conversations and campaigns around reproductive justice. The goal was to develop strong organizers to inform national policy agendas and inform local policy change tailored to every state. Out of all the states we worked with the Latina Advocacy Network in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas was the most active.

The diverse group of Latina immigrant women, which form the Teexas Latina Advocacy Network came together in February 2006 and have been working with local organizations and community leaders to advance women's issues in the region. Their organizing is centered on increasing access to reproductive health care for all women. Their strategic campaigns have involved marches, health fairs, and meetings with local officials. Campaigns they have tackled include obtaining necessary transportation access in rural communities and most notably, mobilizing around supporting Health Care Reform.

The TX LAN constantly cultivates and expands their base in the Rio Grande Valley now expanding to 15 colonias (Alvarado). The activists in this LAN are mostly monolingual Spanish speaking recent immigrant women, with the majority of them being undocumented and not having internet access and living in very rural areas: some colonias do not even have paved roads or electricity today (Alvarado). The leadership within the TX LAN has a mixture of bilingual and monolingual Spanish speakers, with age ranges from 22yrs old to 70 years old, some are undocumented others are not, and all of them are of Mexican origin.

The core group of promotoras that attended our initial Latina Organizing for Leadership and Advocacy training were initially getting paid to specifically organize for reproductive justice at their organization. They did deep community organizing and worked on transportation campaigns to get the buses to expand to colonias and made access to transportation a reproductive justice issue. They specifically saw the need to have transportation so that women could access reproductive health care services at their local clinics. In 2010, there were some transitions at this organization and the promotoras were laid off. At that point, we got funding to pay the lead organizer, Lucy Felix, a stipend to allow her to be the TX LAN coordinator. This funding came as a result of rigorous organizing that the TX LAN had done around Health Care Reform, where thousands of letters were signed, hundreds of in district visits were made, hundreds of people were engaged, and hundreds of events were hosted by the TX LAN during our Health Care Reform Campaign in 2009-2010. After the Health Care Reform Campaign was wrapped up, we called on our activists for more letter signing collection, phone banking, and in district visits to inform health care reform implementation policies.

During the 1st Annual Latina Week of Action for Reproductive Justice in August 2010, the TX LAN managed to collect over 1000 signed letters for that week along with in-district drop

offs as well. For our 2nd Annual Latina Week of Action for Reproductive Justice our TX LAN created a video of their actions centered on our What's the Real Problem educational campaign that reframed conversations surrounding teen pregnancy prevention to de-stigmatize and support young motherhood. They also did story collection for young mothers as a way to raise awareness and visibility for the campaign. They also collected hundreds of signatures for our letter writing campaign asking Secretary Napolitano to end Secure Communities and 287 (g) (Alvarado).

In November 2011 the TX LAN hosted their own Advocacy Week (Alvarado). This was the first time any of the Latina Advocacy Networks had held their own space to train activists on reproductive justice organizing and advocacy centered on their local community needs. The LAN as a team managed to execute this advocacy week successfully and managed to train and recruit 27 immigrant Latina reproductive justice activists. The new activists learned about the history of reproductive justice, community organizing and advocacy, how to talk about abortion in their communities, and lobbying skills.

The Texas Latina Advocacy Network (LAN) was the strongest group because of the women involved were all promotoras de salud (community health care workers) already doing community outreach and education. They worked for an organization called Migrant Health Promotion on topics like prenatal care and tobacco prevention. The women involved already had the leadership skills, passion, structure and buy in from their local community members to help establish the advocacy network as a key stake holder in the fight for Latinx reproductive justice in the Rio Grande Valley. TX LAN was ready to take organized action and had developed a strong base of community leaders by doing informal cafecitos and loterias at health fairs in the colonias where the majority of the activists lived. The colonias are unincorporated towns along the Texas/Mexico border in the Rio Grande Valley. Mexican migrants who crossed the border at

the Rio Grande Valley developed the colonias by settling on ex-rancher land. They rented the plots of land and build homes, electricity, and water systems based on materials found nearby.

My first field visit to the colonias was in October 2009 and it opened my eyes to the fact that these communities were resisting in literally creating their own systems of survival (Alvarado). Not only were the activists in the colonias the most vocal and organized, but they also did the work at the risk of deportation. For example, one of the actions we did in support of the passage of HCR was a march in the colonias. Due to the heavy policing and targeting of undocumented immigrants in the colonias, ICE trucks and officials parked outside the homes of the women leading the march waiting to arrest and deport anyone at will. The women organizing the march were forced to find safety in one of the lead organizer's homes to hide from ICE officials, delaying the march for hours. After waiting four hours, the women decided to continue with the march to bring visibility and support for passing health care reform. What moments like these showed me was the fact that reproductive justice and immigrant rights were interdependent and needed to be reflected in national agendas. Citizenship status should not be a hindrance to accessing reproductive health services or being able to be civically engaged. The direct actions that were done in the colonias always involved a deportation risk that demonstrated what was at stake for the immigrant women involved.

NLIRH's focus on the Rio Grande Valley operated within the historical and political understanding that the most vulnerable Latinxs resided in this area of the US. When I first met the leadership of the TX LAN, I remember being clear that my intentions were to learn how to best support and facilitate their local organizing efforts. I was very transparent about my positionality as a Latina from the South Bronx, NY born of Ecuadorian immigrant parents with little to no exposure to both rural and Mexican communities. Working in this region challenged

assumptions about the ways Latinxs are engaged in the struggle for reproductive freedom. It was at this site that myths about Latinxs being too Catholic to support abortion access or birth control were undone. Activists in this region would go on religious radio talk shows and talk about the importance of having access to women's health care services (Alvarado). Local elected officials that had been historically engaged only by anti-choice folks, experienced a rude awakening when immigrant Latinx women, mothers, grandmothers, and children showed up to their offices advocating for the passage of Health Care Reform that included comprehensive reproductive health coverage. For the first time local elected representatives in the Rio Grande Valley were challenged on their conservative stances and held accountable by their constituents. As a result of our organizing efforts, local elected officials that never engaged with reproductive health matters were now relying on NLIRH and the TX LAN to provide them with educational materials on reproductive health policy (Alvarado). The TX LAN proved to make a name for themselves as strong stakeholders in their respective communities that are vigilant of their representatives.

The irony of the strengthened relationships between the TX LAN and local elected officials is that the majority of the activists mobilized were undocumented immigrant women who were not even recognized by the state or representative they held accountable. The policies that were lobbied on also did not include undocumented immigrants as a way to move policy forward. The tendency to compromise on whose interests are reflected in policy in order to move legislation forward is not justice, but rather reform. It adds insult to injury, to have undocumented immigrant women as a mobilizing base and not reflect their needs in the policy advocacy work.

## Queer Latinx Feminist Futurism

What would a queer Latinx feminist futurist approach to Latinx reproductive justice look like? I would imagine it would incorporate a theoretical blending of queer Latinx feminism, Afrofuturism, and mestiza consciousness where reproductive justice is impossible without LGBTQ liberation.

Afrofuturism holds that history should remain part of identity, particularly in terms of race (1). Anzaldúa articulates her theory of ‘mestiza consciousness’ as a coping mechanism of living in the borderlands, of constantly moving between worlds, navigating and holding contradictory identities, and constantly evolving positionalities. There exists a necessity to learn to adapt to new environments, new cultures, new languages, and face new challenges in the borderlands. Taken together these theoretical approaches can be useful for investigating strategies for a queer Latinx feminist futurism approach to reproductive justice organizing.

In the groundbreaking text *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (2009) edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence exposes non profits for not having the capacity to create sustainable movement building strategies because they are accountable to funders, not their base. The priorities shift and the work becomes shaped by the grants received, and justice is watered down to reform in order to keep organizations afloat (2). The space for Latinxs to explore creative ways to fight for reproductive freedom outside of state and legal interventions becomes stifled by grant deliverables and funder accountability. Thinking creatively outside of state and legal interventions requires more than a framework that was devised within western contexts and by English native speakers. It means investing beyond the current moments that cause reactionary strategy and taking time to think about the future possibilities of queer liberation and reproductive freedom across borders. It

means having hard conversations with those who have been claiming to do reproductive justice work but really are invested in the comfort of the status quo and building empire via non-for-profit work. It means thinking beyond gynocentric definitions of motherhood and heteronormative paternalistic constructs of family. It means acknowledging that there needs to be new language created to reflect the reproductive health care needs of LGBTQ Latinxs in current and future historical accounts of reproductive health, rights, and justice work.

The reproductive justice framework of sexual freedom, bodily integrity and autonomy, and the right for all persons to live freely and in good health is one that applies very well to LGBTQ Latinxs. Reproductive justice will not be possible without LGBTQ liberation. The invisibility of LGBTQ Latinxs in the historical accounts of the reproductive rights and justice movements speaks to the ways reproductive rights, health, and justice is documented and perceived to be an issue that only cisheteronormative straight people care about. On the contrary, the queering of reproductive justice would help illustrate how this assumption is not only false but also problematic and detrimental to understanding the struggle for reproductive freedom.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Latinxs have been a part of movements for reproductive justice and sexual liberation for as long as these movements have existed. The specific health care needs of LGBTQ Latinxs, however—and more specifically the reproductive health issues of direct concern to LGBTQ Latinxs—have rarely been a focus of either LGBTQ or reproductive rights advocacy. Because reproductive health care services are so heavily gendered, even transgender persons who have the resources to see a physician may forgo accessing reproductive health care due to an inability to find a culturally competent provider. In a report by NLRH titled “LGBTQ Latin@s and Reproductive Justice”, issues of LGBTQ

Latinxs accessing reproductive health care are addressed to illuminate the specific barriers that exist in queer communities.

It is important to note that the available information about LGBTQ reproductive health does not include undocumented LGBTQ immigrants and does not reflect the challenges that queer undocumented immigrants face in navigating health care systems. According to the report, in immigration detention, LGBTQ immigrants are subject to harms specifically due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and family status (3). Immigration officials are under no obligation to recognize families that are not legally defined as such, and may therefore make no effort not to separate individuals who have familial relationships based on kinship or affinity. As with any gender-segregated institution, immigration detention centers can be dangerous places for transgender and gender-nonconforming immigrants. Immigration detention officers have been known to put transgender immigrants in barracks according to their assigned sex at birth instead of barracks where the detainee is safest, leaving them vulnerable to violence and sexual assault (4).

Language around LGBTQ communities and reproductive justice in Spanish is still growing and developing. One of the last projects I finished was developing a curriculum and training on LGBTQ Liberation as a Matter of Reproductive Justice. When I was first told of the project, I was aware that in developing new language around queerness and reproduction in Spanish, I was venturing into experimental grounds to think creatively about the way language translates across culture, time, and space. It is necessary to take risks and experiment with language and gauge the feedback from folks in the community when doing educational campaigns and trainings. Like culture, language is not static and it evolves and turns into different things in different communities, and this was the approach I was using with talking



about LGBTQ issues in Spanish. What matters most is that there is a continuation to be willing innovate both the LGBTQ movements and RJ movements by holding a space that brings them together, where they normally would not have been, while continuing to build with folks transnationally across U.S. regions and Latin American countries.

An example of what a queer latinx feminist futurity can inspire is seen in the “undocuqueer” movement, a term and movement developed and led by undocumented queer youth. Undocuqueers are queer undocumented youth who reclaimed language and made it their own. The undocuqueer movement has intentionally organized and mobilized outside of the state by utilizing direct action methods by putting their bodies on the line to protest the deportation of undocumented immigrants and the detaining of gender non conforming undocumented immigrants in solitary confinement. Additionally it is through art, poetry, and writing that the undocuqueer movement has managed to creatively engage issues of social justice and organizing as seen in blogs like [www.undocuwriting.com](http://www.undocuwriting.com). The undocuqueer movement has also invested in holding spaces for undocumented queer youth to engage in arts as a form of activism and envisioning the future.

Prioritizing creative spaces for youth to organize and holding spaces outside of non profit structures to think about strategies of resistance outside of the state is part of what a queer latinx feminist futurity can look like. Investing in working with organizations in Latin America that are also fighting against reproductive oppression would also be a way to envision a queer Latinx feminist future, by deliberately crossing borders to organize transnationally alongside feminist movements in Latin America that hold U.S. public health interventions accountable. Lastly, a queer latinx feminist future would involve popular education methods that teach community health skills related to reproductive and sexual health that considers gender queer bodies, in the

tradition of community health clinics like those started by the Black Panther Party for sickle cell anemia (Nelson, 10).

If the movement continues to reinstate the language, approaches, and analysis that functions through state intervention, it will continue to reinforce biocitizenship which requires an individualistic privatized approach to health care and access based on heteronormative definitions of family that do not consider queer kinship formations, gender queer bodies, or undocumented immigrants. Public policy intervention, legal intervention, and non for profit models will not result in a transformative health model, but rather a model that will continue to exclude the most vulnerable, queer undocumented. Undocumented folks already exist and thrive outside of the state and have developed queer kinship models beyond family formations accepted by the state. In using a queer Latinx feminist futurism the traversing of borders is always already acknowledged as happening.

## **Conclusion**

Historical analysis of the Latinx reproductive justice movement is the ability to be able to take account of the lessons learned to help inform the future practices and approaches of the movement. The history of how the bodies of Latinxs are used as sites for scientific knowledge production paralleled with the history of the ways Latinxs have fought back against reproductive oppression a criminalization demonstrates the resilience and strength in Latinx communities. Latinxs have been able to transform and influence reproductive rights movement work towards a more inclusive multi issue framework of reproductive justice as a result of continued organizing, and mobilization.

I do not want to end this essay on a triumphalist note, but rather a self-reflexive one, as the state of reproductive freedom in the United States has sunk at its very worse since before

passage of *Roe vs. Wade* (1973). In a Guttmacher policy review entitled “A Surge of State Abortion Restrictions Puts Providers –and the Women they Serve—in the Crosshairs” written by Heather D. Boonstra and Elizabeth Nash (2014) states that, “An unprecedented wave of state-level abortion restrictions swept the country over the past three years. In 2013 alone, 22 states enacted 70 antiabortion measures...2011 saw 92 enacted, and 43 abortion restrictions were enacted by states in 2012” (9). The brief goes on to demonstrate how more state abortion restrictions were enacted in 2011-2013 than in the entire previous decade (10). In more ways than one, the status of today’s reproductive rights movement illustrates the shortcomings of the origins of single issue based organizing framework and the exclusion of women of color on the reproductive rights agendas. The sole focus on abortion has proved to be detrimental to the advancement of all women’s reproductive freedom and it has backfired in the most egregious way. With antichoice organizers taking state abortion restrictions by storm, the struggle for reproductive freedom looks more difficult than ever, as reflected in the current status of the Rio Grande Valley.

The term “reproductive justice” has now been taken up by mainstream organizations like Planned Parenthood after years of standing by their pro-choice framework to try to remain relevant. Reproductive justice has also entered the academy and what that will mean is also left to interpretation. Do the origins of “reproductive justice” as a women of color movement lead a grassroots movement to lose its power once it gets into the academy? What are the roles of reproductive justice activists and academics in this institutionalization of movement for reproductive justice? Our stories are narratives that shape the fabric of our liberation. It is where the space of possibility and speculation is allowed and we can dare to imagine a brilliant future.

## Select Bibliography

- Anzaldúa, Gloria, and AnaLouise Keating. *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*. Durham: Duke UP, 2009. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. "La Conciencia De La Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness." *Making Face, Making Soul = Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute, 1990. 377-89. Print.
- Bayetti-Flores, Veronica. "LGBTQ Latin@ and Reproductive Justice." (n.d.): n. pag. Web.
- Boonstra, Heather D., and Elizabeth Nash. "A Surge of State Abortion Restrictions Puts Providers— And the Women They Serve—in the Crosshairs." *Guttmacher Policy Review*, n.d. Web.
- Gutierrez, Elena. *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice*. Cambridge, MA: South End, 2004. Print
- Kohli, Aarti, Peter L. Markowitz, and Lisa Chavez. "Secure Communities by the Numbers: An Analysis of Demographics And Due Process." N.p., Oct. 2011. Web. 9 Dec. 2012.
- National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.
- Nelson, Alondra. *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.
- Nelson, A. "Introduction: FUTURE TEXTS." *Social Text* 20.2 71 (2002): 1-15. Web.
- Nelson, Jennifer. *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*. New York: New York, UP, 2003. Print.
- Philip, Kavita. *Civilizing Natures: Race, Resources, and Modernity in Colonial South India*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004. Print.

"Remembering Rosie Jiménez, Honoring Her Life through Our Work." *Fund Abortion Now.org*.

N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.

Rodriguez, Juana Maria. *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*. New York:

New York UP, 2003. Print.

Roberts, Dorothy E. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of*

*Liberty*. New York: Pantheon, 1997. Print.

Roberts, Dorothy. *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create*

*Race in the Twenty-first Century*. New York: New, 2011. Print.

Solinger, Rickie. *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion,*

*and Welfare in the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001. Print.

Smith, Andrea. "Beyond Pro-Choice Versus Pro-Life: Women of Color and Reproductive

Justice." *NWSA Journal* 17.1 (2005): 119-40. Print.

Tavernise, Sabrina. "Whites Account For Under Half Of Births In U.S." *The*

*New York Times*. The New York Times, 17 May 2012. Web. 09 Dec. 2012.

*The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex*. Cambridge,

MA: South End, 2007. Print.

"The Bonham Daily Favorite - Google News Archive Search." *The Bonham Daily Favorite –*

*Google News Archive Search*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.

Yeung, Miriam, and Amanda Allen. "Eliminating HPV Vaccine Mandate For

Immigrant Women: A Victory On the Road To Reproductive Justice." *RH*

*Reality Check*. N.p., 14 Dec. 2009. Web. 09 Dec. 2012.