

## BOOK REVIEW

### *War Echoes: Gender and Militarization in U.S. Latina/o Cultural Production*

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*War Echoes: Gender and Militarization in U.S. Latina/o Cultural Production.* By Ariana E. Vigil. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014. Pp. 250. \$26.95 (paper).

*In War Echoes*, Ariana Vigil challenges identificatory practices that privilege relationships to the nation-state and “group-based identities.” Instead, by employing transnational Latina/o studies and feminist theory as analytic frameworks, she examines the ways writers expose and censure military violence. She traces a clear genealogy of the many ways that artists and activists critique US militarization, from intervention in Central America to the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Throughout her vital and innovative text, Vigil builds a strong argument for the operation of cultural production as “...a dialectic through which we can view how state-backed violence produces subjects” (7). Her analysis of these dialectical processes pays particular attention to how such texts challenge heteropatriarchal notions of gender and sexuality prominent in commercial representations of militarization globally. Refusing to romanticize discourses of solidarity Vigil demonstrates that “...U.S. military intervention abroad calls for a rethinking of the relationship between U.S. Latinas/os, the U.S. nation-state, and Central American subjects and experiences, while also suggesting that militarism is an inadequate means with which to express transnational solidarity” (33). In fact the texts that she interrogates complicate frameworks of solidarity via “group-based” or national identities by centering “race,

gender, sexuality, language, citizenship and age” as critical intersectional sites for subject formation and knowledge production (33).

Vigil interrogates a rich body of texts focusing on their representations of gender and sexuality and how such representations provide critiques of state-sponsored militarism. From an analysis of gender in the Frente de Liberación Nacional, or Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), to the feminist intervention of “polyvocality” in Ana Castillo’s staged adaptations of Sr. Dianna Ortíz’s memoir, to what she theorizes as “decolonial love” in Demetria Martínez’s classic novel *Mother Tongue*, Vigil demonstrates the importance of polyvocality to “contesting state-backed violence” (65). She then continues with an incisive critique of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell and “homonationalism” in José Zuniga’s *Soldier of the Year*, linking critical discussions about “...who ‘belongs’ in the military” and how that reflects “...a larger anxiety about who belongs in the national community” (122). In her final chapter, Vigil challenges discourses of citizenship by focusing on Camilo Mejía’s memoir *Road from Ar Ramadi*. Mejía, the son of recognized Sandinista activists, was the first US soldier to deploy as part of the US invasion of Iraq in October 2003.

Theorizing the personal trajectories of these artists and activists, Vigil traces their cultivation of political consciousness in ways that are particularly attentive to the intersections of US Latina/o internationalist consciousness and Latin American internationalism. She complicates practices of identity politics that are primarily based on group-identity and the nation-state, showing how the authors and their characters grapple with political allegiances across “glocal” contexts. She makes a critical departure from “transnational” as a framework employing “glocal” as an analytic lens that “...forces us to consider not only multiple national contexts but also events and processes at the

level of the family and ethnic community” (5). Throughout the chapters she theorizes this rich assemblage of experiences across “communities” without romanticizing the shared experiences addressed in the texts, thus exposing the tenuous routes to political activism and solidarity. When she shifts her lens to US intervention in Central America, Vigil focuses on texts both written by and about US Latinas/os, thus making a critical intervention in the privileging of “histories of activism that have concentrated on mostly Anglo, upper-class, and Church-based solidarity workers” (34).

While other authors have utilized the theoretical frameworks of transnational feminism to link US patriarchal state violence with state-sponsored violence, Vigil’s insistence on our attention to the “glocal” makes her work stand out in this important and critical field. Her analysis of polyvocality allows her to demonstrate how a multiplicity of voices and non-linear structures facilitate a critique of nation-based identities. Innovative and insightful, *War Echoes* makes important contributions to multiple fields of study including—but not limited to—Latina/o literary studies, cultural studies, Latina/o studies, and gender studies. Propelled by feminist theory and transnational Latina/o studies, Vigil generatively and incisively demonstrates how cultural production across disciplines operate as valuable anti-imperialist interventions in today’s growing body of US Latina/o literature.