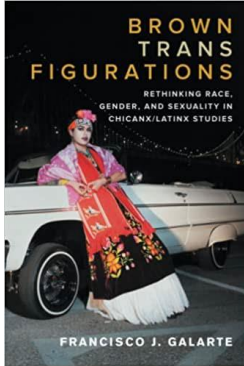




IJIDI: Book Review



Galarte, F. J. (2021). *Brown trans figurations: Rethinking race, gender, and sexuality in Chicana/Latina Studies*. University of Texas. ISBN 978-1477322130. 200 pp. \$29.95 US.

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Keywords: diversity and inclusion; Latinx studies; LGBTQ studies; Trans studies

Publication Type: book review

Brown *Trans Figurations: Rethinking Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Chicana/Latina Studies* is one of the first books that focuses on the trans Latinx experience. In the acknowledgements, Francisco J. Galarte shares his personal experience with the topic as someone that is both trans and Latinx. He addresses how his personal connection has shaped his push to increase diversity and inclusion in his field. Galarte then shares two moments that help establish the main argument of this book: that brown trans narratives have been neglected in both queer and trans studies as well as Latinx and Chicana studies.

The first incident mentioned took place in 2015, when trans Latinx activist Jennicet Gutiérrez interrupted President Obama’s speech in a room with LGBTQ leaders to highlight the need to release LGBTQ immigrants from ICE detention centers. She was booed by members of the LGBTQ community. The second example was the San Francisco mural *Por Vida* by Manuel Paul. The work was done to create brown spaces within the gay community because those spaces are predominantly white. It was also created to give a space to queer people within the Latinx community because Chicana and Latinx spaces tend to refuse to acknowledge queer identities. The mural, which included a trans man in the center, was threatened on social media and was defaced multiple times. Due to incidents like those two, Galarte wants to link transness and brownness together to examine how brown trans subjects are represented and how their narratives appear, circulate, and are reproduced within political and social cultures.

To illustrate how brown trans subjects are deemed unnatural, yet nonexistent, in LGBTQ and Latinx communities, Galarte divides the book into four chapters, the first two focusing on trans Latinas and the last two focusing on trans Latinos. Chapter 1 focuses on the death of Gwen Araujo, a trans Mexican American woman from California, who was murdered by four men—most of them white. The men’s legal team used the “trans-panic,” similar to the “gay-panic,” defense where violence is acceptable due to a deception—arguing trans women deceive cis men by lying to them about their identity. Galarte focuses on this case, and the Lifetime television channel movie made after it, as a way to show how the visibility of trans women of color in political and social aspects does not reduce the violence they face. Due to intersectional identities, including economic and political contexts, it is mostly white trans women that benefit from a certain visibility. Galarte suggests that trans political movements are built on the bodies of dead trans women of color.

In chapter 2, transphobic violence and politics is further illustrated through the death of Angie Zapata. In 2008, Angie Zapata, a teen from Colorado, was murdered by a Mexican American man she met online. Police extracted a confession by playing upon the anger and shame that would come from discovering that one had sex with a trans woman through the transphobic trope of deceiver/deception. The Zapata case was the first in the U.S. where a hate crime law was applied to a victim who was trans. However, the conviction of Zapata's murderer cannot be fully celebrated as a victory for trans rights because, as Galarte argues, the case had more to do with the ascendance of white supremacy and anti-immigrant sentiment. Since Araujo's murderers in chapter 1 were white, they were seen as boys-next-door. Zapata's murderer, a Latino, was characterized as a deviant that posed a threat to the white residents of the Colorado town. While white trans activists championed the District Attorney that fought the case, the outcome of the case was used by that District Attorney to enhance the prosecution and policing of that Latinx community. With these two cases, Galarte demands that Chicana and Latina feminism adapt their language and framework to represent trans identities.

In chapter 3, Galarte explores the construction of trans male masculinity in dialogue with Cherríe Moraga's work. While acknowledging the importance of Moraga's work, Galarte identifies how Chicana lesbian feminism perpetuates white feminism's othering of trans people—labeling them as a threat to womanhood. Moraga argues that trans men of color will reproduce commodified forms of black and brown masculinity that are patriarchal and misogynistic. As a response, Galarte asserts that being trans is not antiwoman. He adds that “there is an overwhelming necessity to consider how race and racialization might shape transsexual narratives, desire, embodiment, and even sexuality” (p. 86). Additionally, Galarte addresses Moraga's claim that surgery and hormones are not an invention of people of color and by perpetuating that myth she puts trans Latinxs in a situation where they must make a choice on their gender identity and their race. He affirms that trans Latinxs are not betraying their race nor their gender identity and clears up the misconception that trans Latinx men who do not choose surgery or hormones are not men.

In chapter 4, Galarte further challenges and redefines what trans means as an identity category within Latinx cultural politics. He documents the historical presence of Latinx FTMs (female-to-male). He elaborates on the historical context of the early 20th century and psychoanalysis that deemed trans people as mentally ill. Trans Latinxs were deemed as criminals and degenerates due to the eugenic discourse on Chicanx criminality. In his historical analysis, Galarte addresses the fact that there are limited trans Latinx narratives because they didn't have the resources to document their stories. He closes the chapter by focusing on the issue that FTM trans people are seen as turning their back on their race if they “give up” on their womanhood by Latinx communities due to the importance of childbirth in relation to womanhood.

Galarte sets out to imagine transness and brownness together and how the communities these intersectional identities belong to would benefit from understanding the other. He wanted to examine how brown trans individuals are represented culturally and politically in those respective communities. Galarte succeeded in doing so. The strengths of this book are the case subjects selected and how those narratives fit into the need to study the brown trans experience. He weaves history, movies, art, and court cases effortlessly as he elaborates on the importance, they play in expanding brown trans narratives. Every reference appears as though it is necessary and is expanded on. Also, every image selected moves the text forward, complements what is being discussed, and the notes compiled at the end are reader friendly. Splitting the book into two parts gives an opportunity to highlight trans women and trans men equally.

Galarte employs a methodology that does not pit transness against brownness, but rather examines them alongside each other. His methodology stresses how they interact in cultural and political constructs and how they coexist within a social and historical context. His methodology allows for a community that has been delegated to statistics to be humanized.

A weakness that could benefit from further elaboration is brown trans individuals and the role Catholicism plays in acceptance and rejection of Latinx communities. Galarte briefly mentions this idea in chapter 1 with the representation of figures like the Virgin Mary in Chicana communities, and in the movie about Araujo's death, but does not elaborate further. There is a deep connection with Catholicism and Chicana communities so it would be interesting to see how Catholicism perpetuates a cisgender identity and alienates trans people with more historical context.

Many texts on trans issues center on white subjects while texts that address the Latinx struggle traditionally omit trans people. As a gay Latino, I appreciate the dialogue that is occurring in Latinx and LGBTQ studies that highlight more inclusive narratives. While everyone would benefit from reading this book, and learning about the brown trans community, it seems that the main intended audience are the LGBTQ and Latinx communities. Both communities should be aware of the intersectional identities of brown trans people that are part of each group and learn to not ignore one identity while acknowledging the other. The book is extremely relevant and important in this current political climate that has villainized both the trans and Latinx community for different reasons. Libraries that have LGBTQ and Latinx collections should consider purchasing this book. If Galarte has shown anything, it is that the issues within those communities intersect and must be addressed simultaneously.

Javier Franco (JavierRFranco@gmail.com) is a PhD in Spanish Literature student in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Houston and a research fellow at Arte Publico Press' Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage ("Recovery") Program. He earned his Master's in Spanish, graduate certificate in Latin American Studies, and Bachelor's in Spanish at California State University, Long Beach. Franco is currently researching Mexican machismo and trauma through the representation of drag queens in 20th and 21st century Mexican and Mexican-American literature and culture. Additionally, his research interests include gender & sexuality studies, film & media studies, queer theory, trauma & memory studies, and digital humanities.