In this issue, one cluster of articles presents scholarly and creative work focused on Latin American queer politics. Each article reveals queer challenges — theoretical, aesthetic, political, ideological, libidinal, corporeal — to prevailing logics of heteronormativity and neoliberalism, and to asymmetrical processes of knowledge production and circulation. Rafael de la Dehesa examines how political responses to AIDS in Brazil enabled surprising alliances between NGOs, activists, and the state, which produced radical social change and, at times, engendered exclusion and vulnerability. Christine Keating and Amy Lind’s essay explores indigenous and transfeminist efforts to transform the Ecuadorian constitution, producing new conceptions of both state and family. Constanza Tabbush and Melina Gaona trace the rise and fall of a neighborhood organization in Argentina called Tupac Amaru, which provided a space of encounter for lesbian, non-gender normative, and marginalized women. In a review of recent work on Latin American sexualities, Juan Camilo Galeano Sánchez finds LGBT people across Latin America and the diaspora deploying “queer revolutionary gestures” as a form of resistance to social, political, and economic marginalization. María Amelia Viteri’s commentary examines the intellectual trajectories of a network of queer scholars from across the Americas. The art essay by Tara Daly engages Iquitos artist Christian Bendayán’s visual efforts to queer prevailing conceptions of the Amazon, and Tatiana de la tierra’s poems offer a deep celebration of female eroticism.

* We have spelled Tatiana de la tierra’s name in lower case in accordance with the wishes of her literary executors.
Another cluster of essays highlights reproductive rights and race in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. Gabriela Arguedas Ramírez and Lynn M. Morgan study the tactics that right-wing, US-based organizations deploy against sexual and reproductive rights in Mexico and Central America. Jennifer L. Shoaff examines the Dominican cultural construction of the Haitian mother as “beggar-mother,” which shores up ideas of pathological black maternity. Ana-Maurine Lara’s article considers the gendered and sexual logics of anti-blackness, and anti-Haitianism, in the Dominican Republic.

The provocation for our cluster on representations of queer identities and politics in Latin America came, broadly, from developments in Latin America in recent decades: the wave of LGBT organizing around issues from same-sex marriage to transgender rights, alongside the continued, if not escalated, violence against trans, travestis, and other queer people in countries throughout the region. More immediately, it came from a symposium on Latin American/Latin@ queer and sexuality studies, cosponsored by the Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies (CLACLS) and the Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies Department at the University of Massachusetts (UMass), Amherst, in March 2013. Several of the papers published here were initially presented at that event and have been complemented and extended by other analytical essays and creative material on similar questions. Based on their familiarity with the debates, Sonia Alvarez, UMass CLACLS Director and professor of political science, and Amy Lind, head of the Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Cincinnati, offered invaluable input for this issue, and we thank them for their intellectual generosity and collaborative spirit.

Three of the articles in the cluster take us inside the complex relations between queer movements and neoliberal institutions, illustrating the distinctive ways these dynamics play out in different national contexts and political configurations. In “NGOs, Governmentality, and the Brazilian Response to AIDS: A Multistranded Genealogy of the Current Crisis,” Rafael de la Dehesa argues that the AIDS crisis served as a “doorway to the state” for marginalized actors, such as sex workers and LGBT activists. These groups pushed for and won a national AIDS program that dramatically reduced rates of mortality and new infections in Brazil in the 1990s through universal access to treatment and a nonstigmatizing approach to prevention. Its success was based, in part, on World Bank
loans and, in part, on a participatory model of public-private partnerships characteristic of neoliberal government. De la Dehesa argues that, “Far from encapsulating activism in a seamless web of biopolitical management . . . nodes of articulation between officials and activists became sites of conflict and productive tension.” However, while the alliances between NGOs, activists, and the state facilitated new challenges to heteronormativity and exclusion, these unequal “partnerships” also left activists vulnerable in the face of the growing strength of conservative evangelical political groups and the retreat of the ruling Workers’ Party from its support of sexual and reproductive rights. De la Dehesa leaves us with a sense of both the possibilities and the contingency of queer activism that is imbricated with the state and multilateral financiers.

In “Plural Sovereignty and la Familia Diversa in Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution” Christine Keating and Amy Lind also describe contradictory outcomes, but find more hope for movements of the excluded in their efforts to engage with and reshape the state. In 2008, thanks to the efforts of indigenous, transfeminist, and other movements, Ecuador’s new constitution recognized both the plurinational character of the state and the heterogeneous nature of families. Keating and Lind argue that these two discursive moves were linked, sharing “a similar logic of multiplicity and open-endedness that work to challenge monolithic and hegemonic social and political forms that had been imposed on Ecuador in a colonial context and then preserved in the postcolonial period.” While activists’ efforts were limited by the opposition of conservative elites, the authors make the claim that resignifying the meaning of the nation and of families is a form of “linguistic and institutional resistance to the coloniality of power.” In addition to supporting multiple modes of politics and relationality, the strategy also contributes to constructing “coalitional approaches that weave together not only the concepts but also the movements themselves.” Although for now, the implementation of the new constitutional discourse may be constrained, the longer term could see the emergence of a shared political project that expands notions of justice.

The third essay of this trio, “Gender, Race, and Politics in Contemporary Argentina: Understanding the Criminalization of Activist Milagro Sala, Leader of the Organización Barrial Tupac Amaru,” by Constanza Tabbush and Melina Gaona, analyzes the rise and fall of Tupac Amaru, a once-powerful neighborhood organization in the Argentinian province
of Jujuy. At its peak, Tupac Amaru offered access to housing, work, education, and healthcare to some 70,000 members, many of them poor, gender-nonconforming women of color. Its alliance with national Peronist governments gave access to significant public resources, but the organization also sparred with the state, advocating for gender equality and the rights of ethnic and sexual minorities. According to Tabbush and Gaona, Tupac Amaru was “the only space poor cis, lesbian, and trans women encountered each other away from the hegemony of the violent heteronormative logics at play in Jujuy’s conservative society,” and a place in which marginalized people could develop a sense of self-respect hitherto denied them. The pride of outcasts and the political power the organization wielded were viewed as a threat by provincial elites and local bureaucrats who waged a vicious campaign to remove its access to federal funding and to criminalize Milagro Sala, its charismatic leader. As in the Brazilian case, Tupac Amaru’s earlier reliance on the state offered the institutionality and legitimacy to make real changes in the lives of poor and queer women of color, but ultimately made the organization vulnerable to the vagaries of elite partisan politics.

Extending the theme of resistance, in “Mobilizing, Negotiating, Surviving: Queer Revolutionary Gestures in Latin America and the Caribbean,” Juan Camilo Galeano Sánchez reviews a series of recent books on Latin American queer sexualities from Cuba to Venezuela and the Ecuadorian diaspora. Drawing on the work of Juana María Rodríguez (2014), he theorizes the forms taken by LGBT struggles for resistance and survival as “queer revolutionary gestures,” which are inscribed both on the body and on the body politic. Galeano Sánchez argues, “Latinxs’ political stances are bonded together in a kind of kinship by gestures, particularly those gestures that are carved both in their bodies and the body politic through the revolutionary processes that have founded their social and moral reasoning.” The successes and failures of these processes “engender opportunities for queer people to launch their own revolutions or, at the very least, to nurture mechanisms of resistance against the countless kinds of oppressions that originate in situations of social upheaval.” He concludes that, for LGBT Latinxs, “gesture is an inseparable part of their identities, their queerness, and their resistance to oppression.”

The first word of María Amelia Viteri’s commentary title, “Intensiones: Tensions in Queer Agency and Activism in Latino América” refers to the thorny relationship between tensions and intentions in the
context of North-South relations among queer/cuir theory and activism. Viteri follows this theme as she “traces the intellectual journey of a dedicated network of queer scholars from across the Americas.” Because of the very differences among the participants, one of the central concerns is the “colonialist structures within knowledge production,” which ensure that queer theory from the North enjoys a far wider circulation than do Latin American conceptions of “lo queer/cuir” and produce desentendimientos—disruptive misunderstandings—between “lo queer anglo” and their Latin American counterparts. The group also explored the tensions between “dry politics,” which operate by objectifying subjects, and “wet” sexualities that elude rationalities and are often ambivalent or opaque. Viteri insists, “it is crucial not to lose sight of the violence of neoliberalism and the global commodification of subjectivities,” which exclude “the most precarious lives and the most sabroso provocative political imaginings.”

Another set of pieces in the Latin American sexualities cluster celebrates and embodies the provocative imaginings of the “wet” sexualities cited by Viteri. Tara Daly’s art essay “Christian Bendayán: Queering the Archive from Iquitos, Peru” focuses on Iquitos artist Christian Bendayán, a visual artist who is of a cohort of Peruvian artists assembling a “counterarchive” that contests the heteronormative frame that has shaped how the Amazon has been imagined and represented. Daly shows how Bendayán’s work effectively “contributes to a queering of the archive of Peru” through an iconographic investment in images of gender nonconforming figures and a commitment to criticizing the violence of extractive industries. In so doing, she shows how Bendayán’s “unique viewpoint validates desiring bodies that thrive beneath the surface of rivers, in the dark corners of the club, and in the shadows of scientific drawings to provide a compelling counterpoint to the way Iquitos has been historically produced. His nontraditional sites of cultural inquiry provide new models for accessing queer desires and for fashioning queer archives.”

Using a different set of creative tools, the poems of tatiana de la tierra (1961–2012) celebrate corporeality and female sensuality. De la tierra was a Colombian poet who authored the poetry collection For the Hard Ones, edited numerous poetry anthologies, and created the magazine Esto no tiene nombre focused on Latina lesbians. Her “Ode to Unsavory Lesbians” describes the speaker’s desire for “a lesbian who’s fat and fleshy / so big she can’t fit through the door at starbucks / and they set up an outdoor café just for her / so fat she wears bangles on her fingers / her
belly is a boom box / her stretch marks are hieroglyphic etchings / she’s so heavy, tectonic plates shift beneath her feet.” In “Topanga Canyon,” de la tierra ruminates on the intimate connections between earth and femininity, describing “trees splayed out like spent lovers” and “polyamorous pussy trees / vibrating from the core / whispering moaning court- ing / in the afternoon wind.” Her desire to “claim the curve of fat inner thigh / close my eyes and bite,” an urge to live, is echoed in her “To My Kidneys” where the author, speaking to her own body, offers a plea “we’re in this together, you and i.” This plea contains the promise of radical vulnerability and echoes de la tierra’s political project: a collective understanding of how we are all “in this together.”

A second grouping of essays in this issue explores themes of race and reproduction in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. In “The Reproductive Rights Counteroffensive in Mexico and Central America,” Gabriela Arguedas Ramírez and Lynn M. Morgan interrogate how conservative religious activists have mobilized transnationally and locally to make Mexico and Central America “major battlegrounds” in struggles over reproductive rights and sexual freedom. Arguedas Ramírez and Morgan make explicit their investment in understanding the strategies mobilized by “pro-life” and other conservative social movements so that reproductive justice activists can develop tactics for critically responding to right-wing political gains. Their essay roots its analysis in a 2013 film released by Human Life International, a US-based Catholic “pro-life” organization, making visible how global organizations collaborate locally to mobilize visual culture for political ends, particularly donor appeals. They conclude by arguing for a conception of citizenship that exceeds “religious precepts,” and thus one that is opposed to “fundamentalism,” noting that “contrary to the film’s message, we argue that there need not be an irreconcilable difference between a life of faith and a life of citizenship. Many Mexicans and Central Americans believe that their faith is consistent with democratic debate, global citizenship, gender equity, and progress toward greater reproductive and sexual health and rights.”

Jennifer L. Shoaff’s “In the Face of a Haitian Child: Racial Intimacies, Paternalistic Interventions, and Discourses of ‘Deviant Black Motherhood’ in Transnational Hispaniola” deepens our understanding of the way race and nationality are imbricated with the politics of reproduction. Rooted in ethnographic research conducted in the Dominican northwest,
Shoaff’s analyses reveal that Haitian women’s subjectivities are representationally and ideologically constructed as a “threat” to the Dominican state and its citizenry, a “threat” that warrants and even requires state intervention and control. Shoaff’s essay focuses on the widely circulating image of the Haitian “beggar-mother,” which links ideas of maternal deviance to racialized conceptions of poverty and criminality, reproducing Haitian women as deviant mothers. As Shoaff indicates, this image of black maternal deviance “resonates transnationally to inform large-scale symbolic and material outcomes across borders.” Indeed, Shoaff reveals that while the “beggar mother” construct might be rooted in the Dominican Republic, it has resonances globally and was mobilized in the wake of the 2010 Haitian earthquake to secure images of pathological black maternity.

Finally, Ana-Maurine Lara’s “A Smarting Wound: Afro-Dominicanidad and the Fight against Ultranationalism in the Dominican Republic” considers how anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism operate to inflict violence on people of African descent in the Dominican Republic. The essay engages in a rigorous analysis of how anti-Haitian “ultra-nationalism” operates in the Dominican Republic as a gendered and sexualized tactic of anti-blackness. For example, Lara describes state policies that render Haitian mothers who are migrants unable to officially register their children as Dominican, even if the children’s fathers are Dominican. She notes, “In a culture in which women continue to have the primary role of raising children, Dominican women of Haitian descent are deprived of the ability not only to legitimize their children, but also to educate them, to care for them through official venues (clinics, hospitals), or to protect them in cases of violence or abuse.” Lara’s project, then, is a critical response to what she terms a “hemispheric crisis of racism,” one that reveals the importance of centering the Dominican Republic in an exploration of “the ongoing hemisphere-wide, state-sanctioned punishment of free black peoples.”

Jennifer Nash and Millie Thayer, for the editorial collective