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Muxerista Pedagogies and Praxis:

Art, Activism, and Scholarship as Resistance and Restoration

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Book Review of The Power of Latino Leadership

***Tamales and Maracas Are Not a Framework: A Muxerista Critique of
The Power of Latino Leadership***

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Review of *The Power of Latino Leadership*

Bordas, J. (2023). *The power of Latino leadership: Culture, inclusion, and contribution* (2nd ed., rev. & updated). Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Pp. 288. ISBN-13: 978-1523004089. Paperback: \$26.95.

**Tamales and Maracas Are Not a Framework:
A Muxerista Critique of *The Power of Latino Leadership***

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The book *The Power of Latino Leadership* by Juana Bordas attempts to honor Latinx cultural values and advocate for a model of Latino leadership but falls short by relying on idealistic representations and romanticized depictions of Latinx identity. The author's love for Latinx people is clear in the storytelling and enthusiasm of the writing. That said, Bordas's attempt to provide a theoretical framework for understanding Latinx leadership is plagued with generalizations and contradictions, is outdated, and lacks theoretical depth. One of the most glaring weaknesses of Bordas' framework is its absence of meaningful scholarship. The framework presented by the author is not substantiated by empirical research nor grounded in established leadership or identity theories. The framework includes ten principles, all of which have catchy Spanish titles, including "Personalismo," "Conciencia," "Destino," "De Colores, Fe y Esperanza," "Juntos," "¡Adelante!," "Sí Se Puede," "El Círculo," and finally, "Gozar la Vida" (p. 10). Unfortunately, the way Bordas uses Spanish terminology and cultural references feels more performative than substantive, resembling a simplified, surface-level portrayal akin to a grown-up version of Dora the Explorer.

Rather than providing depth to understanding leadership within Latinx communities, the author's framework suggests that Latinx people share certain traits, such as valuing family,

generosity, respect, honesty, and service to others. (p. 105). Statements such as "my definition of Latino is anybody who wants to be a Latino" (p. 109), and invites others to be "Latino by Corazon" (p. 241) reflect an assimilationist perspective that misrepresents Latinidad. Latinx identity is deeply rooted in history, politics, culture, and lived experience; it is not something one can simply opt into.

Those unfamiliar with the diverse and nuanced Latinx peoples, cultures, and communities could treat the information presented in the book as fact. Frequently mentioning "salsa" and Mexican food, connecting the idea of "spice" and "flavor" with the perceived vibrancy and energy of Latinx, and attributing specific characteristics to an entire group, such as being "touchy-feely" (p. 229), ignores individual differences within the Latinx population. Bordas describes Latinx peoples as "fiesta-loving, family-centered, hardworking, tamale- and salsa-eating" (p. 105), reinforcing a stereotypical understanding of Latinx identity. The reductive framing reduces Latinx peoples and their leadership to a performative celebration of culture rather than engaging with the structural, historical, and political forces that shape Latinx experiences.

However, Muxerista pedagogy offers precisely the grounded, intersectional framework Bordas's model lacks. Rather than collapsing Latinx identity into a set of shared cultural traits, a Muxerista framework is explicitly committed to challenging all forms of oppression simultaneously, including racism, imperialism, patriarchy, heterosexism, homophobia, nativism, and monolingualism, while making distinctions between Chicanas, white women, and other women of color by understanding the specificity and intersectionality of their experiences (Orozco, 2025; Revilla, 2004, 2022).

Future scholarship on Latinx leadership should engage more critically with decolonial and intersectional frameworks, move beyond broad generalizations to recognize the multiplicity of Latinx identities, challenge rather than conform to dominant leadership paradigms, and center community-based and movement-based leadership rather than institutionalized and elite figures. By adopting a more critical and nuanced approach, leadership studies can better reflect the diverse realities, struggles, and contributions of Latinx leaders, resisting stereotypes and oversimplifications rather than reinforcing them.

This book should be read with a critical eye. Bordas' politics reflect a leadership framework rooted in a different generation, shaped by a more conformist perspective grounded

in respectability politics. Readers should approach the book as a personal and historical account rather than as a guide to the transformative, radical leadership needed for Chicanx and Latinx communities today. The critical questions that came to the forefront as we read this book were,

1. How can ethnic studies, namely Chicanx/a/o and Latinx/a/o Studies provide a more critical analysis?
2. How can a focus on critical consciousness and its role in organizing and serving communities inform a leadership model grounded in a Muxerista pedagogy and framework (Orozco, 2025; Revilla, 2004)?
3. How can we problematize an essentialist conceptualization of Latinidad to inform a more complex and nuanced leadership model?

Unfortunately, these critical conversations are missing from the current book's form.

As scholars in ethnic studies and leadership, we recommend a Muxerista Leadership lens that includes and builds on intersectionality, Chicanx/Latinx feminism, disability justice, Jotería Studies, Latina/o Critical Race Theory, and Critical Race Theory. As many critically conscious scholars have learned from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, education must be student-centered and dialogic to be liberating for marginalized people. As Freire argues in his visionary text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,

A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement (p. 72).

A Muxerista Leadership lens enacts precisely this co-intentional vision. It involves natural dialogue, questioning, and reciprocal exchange between equal participants; is based on lived experiences; and creates mentoring and novice relationships that respect the different levels of consciousness among participants—a model of leadership development that is both relational and politically grounded. Importantly, it does this without romanticizing community: it rejects patriarchal forms of power and leadership and is critical of social justice movements that

maintain patriarchal, racist, homophobic, and imperialist structures (Revilla, 2004). Where Bordas offers *Personalismo* and *Conciencia* as neoliberal leadership values, Muxerista grounds these same relational commitments in a politics of liberation. As Garcia et al. (2024) demonstrated, Muxerista mentoring among doctoral Chicanas is not a cultural celebration but a deliberate survival strategy against tokenism, isolation, and white supremacist institutional norms—a form of radical care done *con corazón* and collective commitment to *conciencia*.

Muxerista pedagogy extends Chicana feminist theory into pedagogical and organizational practice, offering a framework that is committed to challenging all types of oppression, addresses the holistic needs of Chicana/Latina/o communities, bridges lived experience with academia through theory in the flesh (Moraga, 2021) and offers a liberatory solution to racial, gender, sexuality, and class discrimination. Muxerista pedagogy does not romanticize community—it theorizes it from the inside, through collective knowledge production and dialectical exchange. Subsequent scholarship demonstrates the framework's versatility: Flores (2022) showed how a Muxerista lens reframes parent involvement to center the epistemologies of Mexican immigrant mothers—including through m(other)work, spirituality, and storytelling—revealing forms of pedagogical care that schools actively render invisible. Garcia et al. (2024) extended Muxerista into graduate education, theorizing how doctoral Chicanas build critical *conciencia* and collective transformation through peer mentoring in spaces that honor their multidimensional identities. Orozco (2025) provides a Muxerista Activist Consciousness Development Framework that captures the identity and sociopolitical consciousness of queer Latinx/a/o student activists. Together, these works model what Latinx leadership scholarship can look like when it refuses to separate cultural affirmation from structural critique.

Latinx leadership, particularly in social movements, is not just about participation and inclusion but about dismantling systemic barriers. Without this critical analysis, there is a risk of reproducing a *false generosity*, in which leadership is seen as a gift bestowed rather than a collective, liberatory struggle. Bordas' work celebrates cultural hybridity but does not recognize the tensions that come with being a leader in the borderlands.

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