

The Children of Solaga: Indigenous Belonging across the US-Mexico Border. By Daina Sánchez. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2024. 202 pages. \$95 hardcover; \$24 paperback; \$24 e-book.

In *The Children of Solaga: Indigenous Belonging across the U.S.-Mexico Border*, Daina Sánchez explores the experiences of the Solagueño diaspora in Los Angeles, centering the realities of Indigenous Zapotec immigrant youth while also highlighting the intentional efforts made by families to sustain connections to their community of origin. Sánchez shows how these connections are cultivated through participation in brass bands and danzas, as well as through return trips to San Andrés Solaga, Oaxaca, Mexico, that allow youth to experience *convivencia* on multiple levels. These collective efforts enable new generations to build identities grounded in their families' hometown, regardless of whether they were born there or ever visited. In doing so, the book examines how children of Indigenous immigrants form racial, ethnic, community, and national identities away from their ancestral homeland, and how these processes are shaped by migration, discrimination, and community organizing across borders.

Sánchez begins by foregrounding her own relationship to the community, situating the project as deeply personal and accountable. She begins by describing her earliest memories in Solaga as her “first experience of home” (17), signaling from the outset that this is not a detached ethnography but one grounded in lived experience. As Sánchez notes, “In Solaga, the children of Solagueño immigrants, myself included, discover they are not individuals but extensions of their families” (5). This framing underscores the centrality of family and collective belonging throughout the text. Sánchez also explicitly positions the work within anthropology, describing it as “the first book-length anthropological text on the children of Indigenous immigrants written by a member of the community being studied,” a move that both breaks with and engages in anthropological convention (9).

Chapter 1 provides the cultural and historical grounding necessary to understand Solagueño identity, focusing on the cargo system and its role in organizing civil, political, and religious life in Solaga, Oaxaca. Sánchez introduces Floriberto Díaz and Jaime Martínez Luna's conceptualizations of *comunalidad*, and more specifically *goce comunal* (communal joy), as a framework for understanding collective responsibility, pleasure, and participation in community life. Patron saint festivities emerge as central to Solagueño social organization, both in the hometown and in diaspora. These celebrations are not merely cultural performances but also deeply embedded in the cargo system, reinforcing communal obligations and social cohesion. By tracing these practices, Sánchez establishes how structures developed in Solaga continue to shape community life.

Chapters 2 and 3 shift the focus to Oaxacan immigrant life in Los Angeles, particularly in Koreatown and Mid-City, as well as the return trips made by diasporic

youth to their families' hometown of Solaga. Sánchez situates these experiences within existing scholarship on racial hierarchies and anti-Indigenous discrimination enacted by mestizos. She documents how Solagueño youth navigate racialization in Los Angeles while also contending with expectations tied to their Indigenous identity. Participation in music becomes a key site of resistance and belonging. Sánchez describes involvement in the Banda Juvenil Solaga USA Oaxaca as a form of "instrumentalizing resistance." Over the course of two decades, bands, dances, and patron saint festivities have fostered a strong sense of community pride among diasporic Solagueños in Los Angeles.

Chapter 3 examines the significance of return trips to Solaga, particularly for children of undocumented parents. In many cases, families mobilize kinship and community networks across borders, sending children as unaccompanied minors or with relatives who hold US citizenship. These journeys are framed as critical moments of *convivencia* that deepen youth connections to Solaga, people, and responsibility. As Sánchez observes, "Children of Indigenous immigrants not only contend with the legacy of colonization on their parents' ancestral land but must also contend with being socialized in the immigrant-receiving society and how these forces compound to shape their experiences in the hometown" (98).

This chapter also offers an important exploration of language and the tensions that arise between residents and visiting youth. Sánchez documents moments of misunderstanding and judgment, especially around Zapotec language use, while also emphasizing the shared experiences of assimilation. Youth navigate language loss and recovery within parallel processes, shaped by Spanish dominance in both Mexico and the United States. Sánchez resists framing these dynamics through deficit narratives, instead highlighting how belonging is negotiated in multiple ways beyond linguistic fluency.

Chapter 4 centers the role of *bene wekuell* or musicians, and examines the Banda Juvenil Solaga USA Oaxaca as the first band of its kind to feature children of immigrants in LA. Music emerges as both resistance and a source of joy. For undocumented community members who cannot return to Solaga, the band conserves memories of home while also creating new ones for younger generations. Youth participation is shown to be essential to maintaining traditions and ensuring their continuation. Music also functions as a tool to combat anti-Indigenous discrimination, providing youth with spaces where they can feel connected and proud even as they face marginalization in schools and other institutions. As Sánchez notes, music allows community members across generations to maintain ties to their ancestral homeland and to foster relationships among themselves and other Serranos in Los Angeles (108). Through fiestas and performances, the band creates spaces where displaced Solagueños can enact a diasporic version of *comunalidad* and model these practices for younger generations.

In her conclusion, Sánchez returns to the question of language, emphasizing new and ancestral ways of expressing belonging. She explicitly rejects equating language use with culture or treating linguistic ability as a marker of Indigenous authenticity or community membership (120). Rather than predicting cultural loss, Sánchez highlights the possibilities made available through communal spaces cultivated in Los

Angeles, particularly through the band. This approach challenges dominant narratives that frame language loss as the loss of identity and instead demonstrates how Indigenous belonging is sustained through practice, kinship, and responsibility.

Overall, *The Children of Solaga* is an important contribution to scholarship on Indigenous diaspora and Indigenous belonging across borders. Sánchez engages in ongoing debates about who is Indigenous and how indigeneity is lived outside the homeland. As she reminds readers early in the book, “Indigenous people do not stop being Indigenous, become less Indigenous, or stop being interpolated as Indigenous once they leave their homeland” (12).

This book also contributes to the growing scholarship on critical Latinx indigenities (CLI) and diasporic conceptualizations of *comunalidad*. Building on the work of Floriberto Díaz, who is Ayuuk (Mixe), and Jaime Martínez Luna, Sánchez employs Brenda Nicolás’ concept of transborder *comunalidad* to offer a nuanced understanding of how these frameworks operate among Solagueño youth in Los Angeles. Her focus on Solagueño youth resists the homogenization of Indigenous Peoples, even within Oaxacan or Zapotec contexts, while still acknowledging shared histories and practices of collective life.

Finally, this book highlights the work being done by members of new diasporic Indigenous generations, including the author herself. In doing so, it leaves readers with a sense of possibility and cultural continuity rooted in Indigenous futures.

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