[MUSIC - "City of Mirrors," Dos Santos]

Gerry: Hi, my name is Geraldo Cadava, and this is Writing Latinos, a new podcast from Public Books.

Latino scholars, memoirists, novelists, journalists, and others have used the written word as their medium for making a statement about *latinidad*. We'll talk to some of them about how their writing illuminates the Latino experience. Some of our episodes will be nerdy and academic, while others will be playful and lighthearted. All will offer thoughtful reflections on Latino identity, and how writing conveys some of its meanings.

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Now, for the show…

[MUSIC - "City of Mirrors," Dos Santos]

Gerry: Hi everyone. Thank you for tuning in. I'm really excited for the conversation we're gonna have today. We are talking with Sarah Quesada is an assistant professor in the Department of Romance Studies at Duke University, and she's also the author of a new book called The African Heritage of Latinx and Caribbean Literature published by Cambridge University Press.

It's a really thought-provoking book about Latinx and Caribbean literature seen through the lens of what Quesada calls Latin Africa, by which she means the historical connections between Latin America and Africa. Africa as a place and idea, many cultures and Africans as people, and how they all have come together to shape Latinx and Caribbean literature through their enduring influence and through their memorialization.

Sarah, I've been eager to read your book for a while, since it came out, and I thank you for taking time to talk with us about it.

Sarah: Oh, I'm so honored, Gerry, and just so delighted to have you as an interlocutor, thank you for reading me.

Gerry: In your introduction you write about the quote, always present, but erased African influence on Latinxs literature. You also talk about the quote, African haunting of the Latinx authors you write about. Can you say more about what you mean by those terms, presence, erasure, and haunting?

Sarah: Well first of all, I love how you've singled out these very important moments of the text in which, um, indeed there is this presence, this erasure and this haunting. I think I'll start out with the, for the first sort of key term here, which is presence.

What these techs are trying to do is they're trying to produce a kind of south-south solidarity, and at one point, it becomes a very fine line between appropriation, cultural appropriation, and valorization, right, of a tradition that's not your own. Um, and that valorization or solidarity of those that I write about, in this book can be sometimes read as questionable, although I don't think that they are questionable. So I can give you an example, Rivera's poem where there's this haunting presence, right of, of somebody like Henry Stanley, who was a very famous 19th century ethnographer in the Congo, but was also this genocidal figure, the right hand person of King Leopold of Belgium, who of course, is the author of the incredible destruction annihilation of, of 10 million Congolese and a depletion of resources, um, that has led to the Democratic Republic of Congo, uh, to its, debt laden, um, you know, governance to this day. But this is a character that, you know, is conjured in a poem by the, you know, beloved godfather of Chicano letters. And so some people would say, oh, well this is, this is problematic. But rather, I think that, this haunting speaks to the centrality of the history of the Congo, to the region of the southwest, which is where Tomas Rivera was from.

It's very surprising to us because that history of the Congo is totally erased. Which brings me to my next point, in that there is an erasure here of that African history, um, but hopefully also a recovery, right? Um, which is what the book is trying to accomplish. For example, one of the things that Gabriela Garcia Marquez and Cuban American Achy Obejas have in common is Angola. Right. I mean, Garcia Marquez um, is very obsessed with the Cuban Lan, crucible of the Cold War era. Goes to Angola, travels there, writes about it. It's a text that has not been translated into any other language.

At least most of the, his chronicles of Angola, with the exception of one, uh, “Operation Carlota.” Um, but in these chronicles, he trafficks in exoticism, um, in some ways. But Obejas, Obejas, on the other hand, calls this exoticism, this exoticism out. She, she criticizes a commodification of Africa. Um, and in fact of all of the authors that I write about in this book, she is perhaps the only one that, um, is very critical about the ways in which Africanist particularity has been dismissed.

Gerry: In your answer, you alluded to Rivera Garcia, Marquez,. And Obejas, and just to make it clear to everyone, uh, and I'm gonna ask a question about this now. We're talking about Tomas Rivera, the Chicano author of “Y no se tragó la tierra” which I think has been translated to “The Earth did not devour him”. Correct? Right. Yeah. And we're talking about Gabrielle Garcia Marquez, the famous Colombian author, and, um, Achy Obejas, the Cuban American writer. And this was my next question actually, cuz it's, it's a kind of, um, you know, to the uninitiated at least, it's kind of an odd archive, these authors. And by odd I, I, I don't mean perplexing, I mean, unpredicted. I wouldn't have guessed it. So we're talking about a Dominican American writer in Junot Díaz, who's one you didn't mention, um, in your first answer, but Achy Obeja, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Tomás Rivera, and there's also Rudolfo Anaya.

So it's a surprising group of writers to put in conversation with one another by seeing them through the particular lens of Latin Africa. And you say they're often described in homogenous ways as Chicano exemplars or the famous magical realists, Garcia Marquez. And I'm wondering how, how does your book invite us to see them instead?

Sarah: Well, so the short answer would be to see them as Latin African, right? Not necessarily as a category, uh, for race or ethnicity, but rather as a category of literary history. So Nacho Sánchez Prado said this about my book. He says that being able to essentially deterritorialize writers from this, this burdened and marker of the ethnic into the cosmopolitan imaginaries is a very important vindication of their work.

Essentially because, well, I mean, frankly, it's borderline insulting to think of these writers, whether they're Chicano or Dominican American, as near native informants. Because there's so much more than that. Right. And them to be, to have, I find that Latin African, this Latin African dimension is just one of the many ways in which they become cosmopolitan.

Um, Now I wanna, I wanna be clear though, that this category of Latin African is, um, does not replace latinidad um, nor is it an exhaustive historical category. But I think it is a category that in some ways, nuances a conversation about the reach of Latinx writing. So, for example, I already mentioned Obejas's novel *Ruins,* which is set in Cuba, actually uses Badagary, Nigeria repeatedly.

And so you might, one might find it surprising to be reading a novel by a Cuban-American set in Cuba that is also spending some time in Nigeria. Right? But of course, Badagary in this case is used as a sort of a symbol to, to criticize the commodification of blackness, not only in Cuba and its diaspora, but more, more in general in Latinx literature.

Um, or Ananya, who you mentioned, um, is, it might seem strange to think about his connections to, uh, plant autocracy, but there was a, a US plant autocracy in the southwest where he was from, and that plant autocracy is connected to the Congo in many. So, um, so these are the ways in which they become really more than I think the, these like sort of, especially in the case of Ananya, you know, who's read usually as this folklorist Chicano sort of in ethnic studies and what world literature perpetuates and circulates about him is this sort of, this notion of him never really leaving the US Southwest, right? Never leaving New Mexico, but he does indeed leave. Um, so, um, so that's the sort of the Latin African connection I, I want to, to drive home.

But I also wanna say something about identity politics, just with regards to sort of the, what you called about expec- what you term sort of the, these expectations of how, what, how we group together these writers through this sort of Latin African lens.

So this is not a book about race, right? This is, this is really about a book about the exclusion of African history in Latinx studies. And also the, the irony that we want to formulate concepts about blackness and of blackness without Africa. In the same way that we wanna formulate notions of latinidad without Latin America.

This is really a, a book that explores how African history and that's political history, cultural history, literary history, weighs and therefore haunts, um, some of the stories that we tell ourselves about, about latinidad. And it's my personal view, that I really don't think that, uh, any author has to be of African extraction to be able to comment on how anti-black bias affects the particular communities of from where they are from.

Whether you're Chicano, whether you're Jewish, white, Cuban, American, that who also identifies as queer, Colombian or Mexican. You know, I see this trend, um, happening. Uh, currently there's this sort of scary return to identity politics, um, in which we want to pigeonhole authors to an identity and that's seen as progressive when actually that's quite exclusionary. It's especially exclusionary of marginalized communities in the global south.

Gerry: Arey ou talking about this idea that we can only kind of write from our own personal experiences?

Sarah: Yeah. So I think that, for example, uh, the fact that Tomás Rivera or Achy Obejas are writing about Angola or writing about the Congo and we want, and we look at that and view that with suspicion should give us some pause.

I think that there is, you know, there, there's the sense that, again, that these writers, by virtue of their identity can only function and can only have authority in the very sort of ethnicity that they belong to, and I think that's dangerous because it really limits– um for example, I'm, I'm Mexican, right?

Um, of Mexican descent, but I can't teach a class on Mexican literature, you know, and, uh, and I, and I don't, and I wouldn't, and I wouldn't want people to expect me to do that. Right. Um, I, I'm very proud of, of my Mexican origins, but that's simply not what I am dedicated to. That doesn't mean that at one point I don't wanna go into, you know, and that doesn't mean I can't teach what I, what I am, and I think that we should do, we should keep doing that.

But I also think that there's no reason to deny, um, that, um, our authors that are of some sort of ethnic background cannot. Way, an opinion of another region, especially when the US was complicit in that hegemonic, uh, shift, right? That hegemonic, um, exploitation, um, of regions, not only of Central America and Latin America, but also the Congo, Senegal, uh, South Africa, Angola, right? Um, a lot of these covert missions of the Cold War era, for example. Um, or the exploitation of the Congo for its minds in, for its diamonds in the 19th century. So, um, so these are all histories, I think, that show how much more globally oriented these authors are.
Um, and and more importantly, the global reach of Latinx writing.

Gerry: Each of, each of the authors you're writing about the as Junot Diaz, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Rodolfo Anaya, and Tomas Rivera and Achy Obejas, they're, they're all involved in some act of memorialization of this relationship between Africa and Latin America, and it has this kind of temporal, their memorialization has a kind of temporal aspect to it as well, because you're talking about how they're rehabilitating the past in the present and how is that past reshaping our understanding of the presence, specifically by Latino authors and how they want us to understand Latinidad and Latino identity?

Sarah: So I'm, I'm going to tread carefully with this question because, um I'm a literary historian, but I'm not an official historian. And so its outside of my wheelhouse to, to talk on sort of like the methodologies of history here. But I think this book is thinking about rehabilitation as a recovery that makes it available to us in the present, but not necessarily to borrow your term, uh, reshaping our present. What this book wants to do is reshape our past. Um, and I think that the

four chapters that constitute the book, um, recover the ways in which Africa has been rendered, fearful, commodified, obliterated, and distorted.

Um, and, uh, so we can understand how Africa has functioned during its own special temporality and on its own terms. So for example, how, and I was talking about the Congo earlier, but how, for example, Congolese history was foundational for the understanding of Chicano identity in the US Southwest for somebody like Anaya or, or Rivera. Not only, uh, because of the horrific discourses of 19th century, you know, John Gregory Burke, the, the sadistic ethnographer who, uh, you know, penned the infamous "the American Congo," but to understand how the American Congo was inherited from discourses about the Congo itself. Uh, written in and within the Congo, and that too is our heritage by association.

So, so that's what I mean about sort of re, revisiting this history. Um, when we talk about the past and the present, um, I mean, I mean it more in, I mean, sights of memory, uh, because sites of memory are representations of the past. Any memorial site, like the UNESCO slave route is a, is a memorial to the past. Um, It's, it's brought into the present because it's been rehabilitated, therefore we can now visit it in the present. Um, and when we visit it in, in our present, we know that the events that unfolded in that site are events that happened in the past. So, um, so, so this concept is, is, is then connected to text because like physical memorials, I find, and I argue in the book that, that that texts or narratives, fiction, et cetera, can serve as a launching pad to revisit the raced history, or rather, more precisely it's a visible Latinx solidarity with other sites of anti-colonial struggle.

Gerry: I wanna, I feel compelled to give listeners another nerd alert here, because I'm gonna be talking about things like structure and chronology. But you know, I, I am a historian and so to read a book that is structured in kind of a reverse chronological order is just like mind bending to me. It's like I don't know how to operate, uh, in some kind of framework that is outside of a progression from the past to some moment closer than the present. But you did choose to, uh, structure your book in kind of reverse chronological order, starting with Junot Diaz, then Achy Obejas, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and then Rudolfo Anaya and Tomás Rivera. So, uh, I'm sure that was intentional. And so I'm wondering what kind of purpose for you, um, in terms of argumentation or whatever, uh, that decision served for you?

Sarah: Um, So now this, this may be a sacrilege to your historian ears, Gerry so forgive me.

Gerry: That's okay. No, I'm, I'm open to it.

Sarah: Um, um, well, so I, I do believe that this book is, is challenging this notion of linear history to some degree. Um, because I think that we have a tendency, again, I'm not a historian so I can't say this with, um, all certainty, but I, I think that there is a tendency in historical, uh, recordings, at least– not from her Horatatus, you know, necessarily because he actually had a circular way of talking about history. But, but at least from, I don't know, say the Renaissance forward, we there, there has been this notion that history is written in a pretty linear fashion, right? And to put this into perspective, when I teach this notion in my class, I have my students read, um, the short story by, um, , uh, "The night, the night facing up," I forget what it's translated as.

Um, and it's essentially for those that have not read the story, the short story, it's um, it's essentially historian, which the protagonist has a motorcycle accident in Buenos Aires, wounds up in a hospital, and, um, he kind of falls in and out of consciousness. And when he is asleep, he dreams up this scenario in which he is, uh, a indigenous captive that's running away from the Aztecs who want to commit him to, a sacrifice for the gods.

And anyways, at the end of the story, he actually finds out that what he was dreaming, the the Aztec empire period is the present. Oh, sorry, is this, is is the reality and that the motorcycle accident, Buenos Aires is the hospital, et cetera, is the dream. Now, my students interpret this story as being fantastical because of course it's impossible to dream the future. Right? Temp temporarily. We know that motorcycles existed after the pre-Columbian, pre-Hispanic civilization, so, so that's anachronistic. So they say, well, it's just a fantastic story. That's, of course, it's deemed fantastic when it's read in a linear fashion.

But if you read time in a circular way, like the ca-, like the Aztec calendar, It's just a ordinary story, co rrmún y corriente, right? And so I think that, um, this framework of time is something that I am honoring in the book. Oral Proverbs and African history, um, sometimes function in this way and non-linear terms.

Sometimes ri-ri-risomatic, sometimes they're circular. And Oral Proverbs were an essential part of, of African history, um, despite the fact that for many years they were not deemed historical, right? Because they weren't committed to writing. And so they, they had, they had no business being historical, right?

Uh, and so this is sort of like the moral imperative I guess, of the, of the, of the, of the order, of, of things not to, not to cite Foucault. It's sort of reading, uh, uh, in terms of con cause and consequence, uh, reading from the consequence backwards and upstreaming to, uh, to understand, for example, I don't know, um, the anti-black bias in places like the Dominican Republic.

Right? Um, and to understand that anti-black bias is just a product as much a product of colonialism in, uh, I don't know, a place like Haiti and the Dominican Republic Española as it is in Benin and the Republic of Dalmay where, um, voodoo and, and dis discourses of, of zombism come from and were distorted even before the middle passage. And so to understand that, that that sort of discourse, you have to begin from the present and upstream. Towards the, towards the, now I forget which direction we're going, but anyways.

Gerry: Back towards the past.

Sarah: Exactly. Yeah.

[MUSIC - "City of Mirrors," Dos Santos]

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[MUSIC - "City of Mirrors," Dos Santos]

Gerry: Multilingualism seems to be an important part of your method, beyond the existence of sources in many different languages that help you tell your story like Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English, why is multilingualism an important concept for you?

Sarah: Well, there's no question that had I not been able to speak or read Spanish, Portuguese, French, I wouldn't have been able to write this book. I mean, a lot of the source materials that I, um, access are from like 17th century treaties in the Congo and, and in Dalmay are, are in French. Um, you have Henry Stanley's correspondence that's in English… But, you know, Garcia Marquez, um, all of his interviews in which he discusses Angola, all of his chronicles about Angola are actually not translated, uh, into any language. And so, Spanish was definitely necessary there. And then media about the neoliberal turn in West Africa is in French, and so I had to consult that too.

So there's no question that multilingualism was important, uh, for me and necessary. But, but I do wanna point out that I think that this kind of work, what this work entails, this transnational and trans-Atlantic scope can be done. It, it, it, it's less about requiring fluency in languages in more to quote Josie Saldaña Portilla in more a fluency in, uh, what she calls a multiple Latin American histories that intersect with United States bloodied quest for hegemony, right?

And so, so a global outlook and, and a, and an interest frankly, a genuine interest in, in these global histories. Um, but I think that more often than not, there is a, a shyness, a a, a timidness, um, about languages and, and the cultures and the histories that they represent. And, uh, and so this book challenges that, uh, timidness, that shyness and, and brings, like I said, Latinx conversatio–, Latinx literature into conversation with African politics, history, literature.

Gerry: Latinidad itself is about multilingualism… I think, I think it's dawning on us that this is the case. It's not just about Spanish, but it's also about indigenous language and the incorporation of, um, African influence as well.

So, I kind of thought that that had to do with your multilingualism as well?

Sarah: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I think that more often than not, people come to me and say, well, but isn't like, well, I had this conversation with a colleague and, and this colleague said, but isn't multilingualism a sign of, of, of privilege?

And I said that, I actually think that multilingualism, the, the, that, that notion is a, a gross mischaracterization. Um, because actually multilingualism if anything is a reflection of the

global south. You can drop a pin anywhere in the global south and you will find that people in those regions speak multiple languages. If you go to North Africa, uh, people speak French and Spanish and Arabic and English. If you go to Oaxaca right, people speak Zapoteca and Mixteca and Spanish and, and are also able to seamlessly move between the linguistic worlds that those languages represent. And, and that is a true sign of cosmopolitanism, but we're so ingrained to read it through our US-centric apparatus…
Um, I didn't write about this in the book, um, but I wrote about it for, um, Marissa López and and John Alba Cutler for a project they have. This poem, it's, it's, it's, uh, it's a thrilling poem. I think it's one of the most complex poems in our, in our canon, um, by Miguel Algarín, it's called Tangiers. It's about exac– exactly that region that I was talking about, Morocco, and it's a poem that's in French, Spanish, and English.

And what it's trying to do, it's, it's trying to emulate that cosmopolitanism of these young boys that are sold into the sex trade there. And the poetic voice is really taken by, uh, how truly cosmopolitan these children are, despite the fact that they have absolutely no agency in their own lives. Right?

But they're still, but the poetic voice is still marveled, uh, by this, by this again, this multilingualism, this, this, this cultural astuteness that, to be honest, we're kind of losing in this country.

Gerry: One of the things I really appreciated about your book and about you as a scholar is that you take Africa very seriously, and I I didn't know that you were also trained as an Africanist, and so you're not just using Africa or blackness as a kind of, um, monolithic or empty category you're taking African folklore, African cultures seriously. And so about this method, this is an important part of the way that you went about this project. And about this approach. You write, quote, “my fieldwork along the slave route highlights the mutually constituting ways in which physical and textual memorials reconstruct a Latin American narrative in places we might not have looked initially.”

So, I, I wanna know about what your field work along the slave route looked like. What, what is the work you did there?

Sarah: So when I started my project, I wanted to find out more about these Latin African narratives from the African point of view. And so I thought, well, what better sites to research in than sites in which the Americas would be thought about or invoked all the time?

And that's the UNESCO Slave route. Um, and the UNESCO Slave Toute was a project initiated in partnership with Haiti and Benin in 1992. And that was, um, essentially what they did is they rehabilitated former slave trade points, um, along the West African coast. And that essentially, uh, turned into a UNESCO sponsored heritage circuit that single-handedly saved a lot of these African nation states from bankruptcy after, you know, decades of civil unrest. So, um, so yes, it's a neoliberal project and it's far from benevolent, but they are sites in which I could go and, for example, inquire in the locality about, you know, their point of view of what exactly happened in these spaces. Um, I also spoke to historians there. I spoke to acquaintances, it was similar to the

kind of research that Saidiya Hartman did for *Lose your Mother.* I wanted to sort of figure out where latinidad was triangulated in these sites, if at all.

And, uh, and, you know, um, these guides would tell me, you know, I would tell them about, you know, me, me being Mexican. And so they would say, "oh, you know, we, I met Shakira," or they'll say and say, "oh, do you sing like Selena?" You know, things like that. You know, like they would hold onto the cultural markers that they had to connect, which I thought was brilliant, you know?

But it, it became very, uh, very, um, evident that at these sites, history was being performed for the tourist, right, for the visitor. And so star stories were being catered for the visitor. And indeed, when James Sweet, the Africanist historian James Sweet says that when he went to Elmina American influence was everywhere, I very much found that to be the case.

I should have also mentioned that I also went to these sites because the site of Badagry and Goré in Senegal were memorialized in, uh, in, in Achy Obejas, in *Ruins* in this, you know, novel that she published in 2009. So I was like, you know, very intrigued by these sites of memory.

And so I went out to, to see what kind of stories were being told there. And, um, at least to Senegal and, and Benin. And, um, and so anyways, this is what sort of became the foundation, the sort of theoretical foundation of the book.

I decided that if historical sites of memory use fiction, right, because, you know, maybe they never met Selena. Uh, maybe they never met Shakira. Who knows? Right? But if historical sites of memory used fiction to produce a Latin African engagement, then how could fictions use these historical sites for the same means? So, in other words, that's what brought me into this notion of a textual memorial, which is actually a term that I elaborate from Mary Pat Brady.

And textual memorials function as essentially a recovery method. If you read a text spatially, um, with pauses and contemplation like you would a heritage site, um, and with a little help of the speculative, um, which I know I'm speaking to a historian, but, you know, just don't, don't mind me and my speculative, but the speculative, I am a historian, but public books is for a broad interdisciplinary humanities audience, so I can roll with speculative. It's great. Um, yeah, so, so a little bit of the speculative, a little bit of like, sort of thinking about pauses and contemplation you and with informal interviews, um, it, all of these, these notions sort of produce a narrative that you can then compare uh, to the text because the text is also using these spatial, these, these spaces in which you can, again, can contemplate and pause and use a little bit of the speculative, um, to reveal lost traces of an African influence or an African engagement.

Gerry: Last question. Uh, there's just so much talk in the world these days, and I guess by the world, I mean my, my world of Latino identity, Latino history and culture about centering blackness and fighting anti-blackness in the conversations that we're having about Latino identity.

You know, a lot of this has to do with the recorded audio tape of the LA City Council members. Saying what they said. Some of it has to do with a recent proposal by the Census Bureau to

collapse the race ethnicity question on the 2030 census, which has a lot of Afro-Latino organizations concerned. Uh, so I'm curious, you know, your, your book is certainly intervening in these conversations, and it has, it, it, it's dialogues with them, but it's coming at it from a very, different angle less, less, uh, you know, about the kind of public spectacle of a scandal that needs to be addressed immediately and more about just kind of fundamentally rethinking all of the things that shape us.

So, I don't know, maybe I just answered the question I'm about to ask, but I'm wondering how you see your book in dialogue with these kind of very public conversations about centering blackness in conversations about Latinos.

Sarah: In the spirit of keeping it short,what I will say is this, is that, We, we have to remember that the US is a hegemony, and as such, it's going to produce ideologies of supremacy. And US multiethnic communities are not gonna be immune from performing these discourses or appropriating them. I mean, you, yourself, and your work have have said as much, um, others, uh, like Erica Edwards, um, regarding the complicity of black writing and US hegemony, for example, has discussed this. Patricia Stuelke, *the Ruse of of Repair*, the complicity, for example, in queer theory and practices of exclusion, right? So this is not necessarily new, but, but I think that in terms of Latino scholarship, Latino scholarship has a lot to lose or gain depending on what direction the field takes. Latinx scholarship can praise centering blackness all at once. But can it, can we center blackness without Africa? It's a question, right? I mean, I think that the categories we have in this country to speak about racial exclusion are insufficient at best, or universalist and hegemonic at worst, because they do not bother to consult other disciplines outside of the US because, you know, because they think that only the US matters.

Um, it's, it's like saying that undocumented people only begin to matter to the discipline the moment they enter the US border space and not a minute before. I, I feel very similarly and I, again, I don't mean to be provocative here, but I feel kind of similarly about the category of Latinx actually. Um, which I find to be exclusionary of Spanish speaking, the Spanish speaking community. Because the o was always already gender neutral. What, what, what, uh, gram grammarians call gender neutral because it's an expression of what they call grammatical gender and not what they call, uh, biological gender or what we might call a sex assigned at birth. Right? Um but we don't bother to understand Spanish and or the way Spanish functions because we are reading it from a US centric perspective. And worse imposing that term onto a Spanish speaking population that happens to be the most vulnerable in this country. And that doesn't seem, uh, right from a progressive perspective.

I'm not saying that we need to do away with Latinx as a term, but I'm saying that far from collapsing categories, I think that we need to broaden them, um, and have various choices. And if we want to center blackness, We need to follow Franz Fanon’s, lead , uh, who pled, who would, was always pleading for, um, an an internationalism that was first and foremost interested in case studies all over the global south, um, literacy campaigns from Burma to Argentina.

Um, he says, in *the Wretched of the Earth*, this is the true internationalism that perhaps, perhaps wasn't available to us in the 20th century, but this is the 21st century,

GERRY: I mean, I have heard many critiques of Latinx, but not this one in particular, how it kind of, um, underscores this American provincialism and lack of understanding of how Spanish actually works and what the o in Latino is supposed to signify.

So, uh, that's really interesting. Thank you for that. Um, I think I might have interrupted you. So did you have any concluding words that you wanted to say?

Sarah: I think that the controversy with the LA City Council.I think that yes, there was a lot of discussion about the ways in which we have had inherited biases from Latin America, but there was very little discussion about how those have been perpetuated and continued in the US. And I think that again, to center blackness involves turning around and valorizing the communities that are being disparaged.

In this case, Oaxacans. And again, as I mentioned, Oaxacan are profoundly cosmopolitan because again, they speak Mixteca and Zapoteca and Mazateco in addition to Spanish and other languages, European languages that they have to learn to, uh, cater to tourism, right? So we should find that admirable and valorize it and that, I think if we, if we can center cosmopolitanism, then we can center the, the race and the ethnicity components that go with that.

Gerry: Thank you so much for joining us. I mean, here you have it, folks. This was Sarah Quesada talking about her new book, *the African Heritage of Latinx and Caribbean Literature* Plus so, so much more. I, I hope you enjoyed this conversation and thank you so much for spending some time with us, Sarah.

Sarah: Thank you, Jerry. It was such a pleasure to speak to you.

[MUSIC - "City of Mirrors," Dos Santos]

Gerry: Thank you for listening to this episode of Writing Latinos—

We'd love to hear your suggestions for new books that we should be reading and talking about. Drop us a line at geraldo@publicbooks.org

This episode is brought to you by Public Books. It was produced and edited by Tasha Sandoval. Our music is "City of Mirrors" by the Chicago-based band, Dos Santos.

I'm Geraldo Cadava. We'll see you again right here, in two weeks.

[MUSIC - "City of Mirrors," Dos Santos]