AMÉXICA: DE MÉXICO, POR LA FRONTERA Y AL NORTE

EXPLORING THE AXIS OF 21ST CENTURY MEXICAN AND U.S. IDENTITIES THROUGH PRINTED AND VISUAL MILLENNIAL RHETORICAL MEDIUMS

by

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Abstract

This dissertation delves into re-casted, re-negotiated, and emergent U.S. and Latino perspectives that are resulting from trans-border cultural and national fusion and undocumented Mexican immigration to the U.S. between the years 2000-2015. Five cultural products - - newspaper headlines, literature, music, political cartoons, and memes - - as produced by Mexican individuals on one side of the U.S.-Mexican Border and undocumented individuals on the other, who are part of the millennial generation, are considered against fossilized notions of gender, race, class, and national identity to determine if and how millennial Mexicans and millennial undocumented individuals are leveraging specific cultural tokens to be tools of defiance and to promulgate a re-writing of self.

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Introduction

In the pages that follow, I sketch a synopsis of contemporary textual, aural, and visual mediums surrounding the recasting and renegotiation of identity and relationships taking place in the U.S.-Mexican border region during the first fifteen years of the millennium. I explore imaginary and concrete figures in the societies and cultures on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border that appear to occupy a unique space of displacement yet are often inaccurately or cartoonishly represented in both (and to what end). I examine five means of cultural production -- newspaper headlines, literature, music, political cartoons, and memes - - to demonstrate that the DREAMer generation in the U.S., and its Mexican millennial counterpart in Mexico, are impacting an intercultural style of expression and identity (a U.S.-Latino hybridity) that speaks to how Mexican immigrant identity in the U.S. and in Mexico has evolved. Similarly, I examine if and how there is a process of recuperation or renegotiation occurring in terms of identity, culture, and language.

The DREAMer generation, with their unique millennial, bicultural, transborder perspectives, are recognized as the children, teens, or young adults brought to the U.S. outside of current legal entry pathways, who have integrated into U.S. culture, and who have been primarily (or exclusively) educated by U.S. school systems. They may or may not speak Spanish, remember their home countries, or even be aware that they do not possess documents until attempting to mature into American society by obtaining a driver's license or applying to college. Best estimates suggest that there are approximately 1.8 million members of this immigrant group currently in the U.S. (Ramos, "The Latino Wave"). Evidence explored in this project shows that

DREAMers and their millennial cohorts on both sides of the border are changing the formerly static view of Mexicans and *estadounidenses,* of Mexico and the U.S.

During the investigative process, I was often confronted with the question of whether DREAMers relate to the plight of Mexican-Americans and Chicanos, other socio-ethnic and politically charged groups, influential in their own right, in terms of having played a role in the shaping of national dialogue and internal U.S.-Latino identity formation. While a muddling of terminology often occurs about these groups, the single most significant difference between them is citizenry, representative of the notion of "belonging" (or not). Mexican-Americans are the children of immigrants and possess citizenship from birth. Those that comprised the Chicano movement were often the children of those children, owning an even stronger sense of "American" and belonging as naturally occurs when succeeding generations integrate into American culture. DREAMers do not possess citizenship and cannot under any current U.S. immigration law and policies. They are therefore often relegated to a position of not having any legitimate "right" to feel the same sense of citizenry (or prerogative to pursue freedoms) expressed by Chicanos and Mexican-Americans alike.

This fact has created a noteworthy tension that spills over both sides of the U.S.-Mexican divide punctuated by a single underlying truth: DREAMers weren't born (assumingly like other immigrant groups), they were **created** (emphasis mine). Because this immigrant niche group was fashioned as a direct result of U.S. policy and law, they are indeed in a unique category of "other" and represent uncharted territory in terms of cultural, societal, and political wrangling. There is a larger amount of responsibility on the American government, policy makers and enforcers, and society at large to take action in solidarity with this group, which would essentially

necessitate acknowledging the mistakes that led to their "creation" in the first place. If history is any gauge, this is unlikely to occur in explicit or meaningful terms as long as the cost-benefit symbolic expenditure is not massively in favor of U.S. political and economic interests, which such reform action is not.

In attempting to delineate what are the Mexican or American narratives of the twenty-first century, three articles in particular offer conservative ammunition to anti-immigrant, anti-reform, or anti-Mexican stance: "Who is a citizen? The battle is begun", by Howard Fischer, "What Makes an American", by Michelle Malkin", and "The Special Case of Mexican Immigration: Why Mexico is a Problem", by Samuel Huntington. Fischer and Malkin speak specifically to efforts to "reclaim the original intent of the 14th Amendment" (Fischer 1) and hazards of what has often been deemed a dangerous phenomenon, "anchor babies" (Fischer 2).

Malkin would appear to be proponent of such a modification to current law as it would eliminate "Americans by accident", or rather those individuals born in the U.S. to undocumented, foreign-born parents who manipulate the citizenship clause as "alien lawbreakers" and are well within the same threat category as "terrorist infiltrators and enemy combatants" (1). She employs a constant use of "us" being in direct conflict with "them", illustrating the common impulsive retort that "those" immigrants are "not an American in any real sense of the world" (Malkin 2). Such notions will be challenged in the chapters to come with the assistance of carefully selected cultural tokens of the twenty-first century (newspaper headlines, literature, music, political cartoons, and memes).

While the above two examples illustrate a more bombastic style of rhetoric, Huntington uses evidence to subtly convey the exact same conservative stance: that "[m]uch of what we now

consider to be problems concerning immigration and assimilation really concern *Mexican* immigration and assimilation" (20). The five most significant characteristics of this "phenomena" that differentiate Mexican immigration in the late 20th and 21st centuries from any other immigrant group and time period in American history are contiguity, substantial increase in numbers, a new illegality component, regional concentration, and persistence. While this is not necessarily incorrect, the implications that the above five categories could have on contemporary U.S. society (particularly in regard to jobs, marriage, and language) suggested by Huntington do come into direct disagreement with numerous scholars (Chavez 53-67, Chomsky, "How Immigration" and "20 Myths", Nevins, Ramos, "Latino Wave" and "Manifesto") who have meticulously researched the subject of Latino immigration and integration into the U.S. and concluded the opposite.

Curiously, Fischer, Malkin, and Huntington employ techniques typical of those used when constructing a Latino Threat Narrative (LTN), a politico-cultural theory originally posited by Leo Chavez about generating calculated and manipulative media and public discourse to be discussed at length in Chapter One. In his book, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*, Chavez illustrates how Latinos have not just become a contemporary focus of a threat narrative construction but have essentially been one in the U.S. since before World War I (evidence of which is supported by Chomsky, "How Immigration", and Nevins). It is a humbling account as one becomes tremendously aware of how an entire society is prey to a deliberate "discursive formation" that creates a passive idealistic legion (citizens and/or the "favored") against entire social sects of the "undesired" (illegals) (Chavez 25). Even when

information is available that blatantly contradicts that which is a part of the threat narrative, it is not sufficient to change the tone of public reaction or stance or diminish gullibility (Chavez 71).

Important parallels between the broader, national, Anglo dialogues in which all Latinos are threats to national security and economic prospering (an "all-purpose" LTN) and narratives of "self" within Mexico may exist. This project will examine if and how twenty-first century Mexicans and Mexican immigrants are re-considering their identity, confounding expectations of both the Anglo <u>and</u> *mexicano* communities, and how such re-negotiations are manifesting on both sides of the border. It is vital to question whether the increasingly antagonistic refusal of the American political (and in some regards, social) system to offer access to such important sectors such as post-secondary education and legal (good) jobs could boil over into violent conflict, particularly in Chapters Three through Five. Guitérrez suggests that the Chicano movement, particularly during the 1960s and 70s, represented a "political coming of age" ("Walls and Mirrors" 87) - - could this not be happening again with millennial Mexicans and their DREAMer counterparts, representative of a new "collective mentality" (87) that will (or is) take on its own momentum, and evoke its own socio-cultural/socio-political consequences, as the Chicano activists before them? Could, as Jorge Ramos suggests, "not having an identity" may well be the DREAMer path to concrete identity formation and subsequent meaningful action and unprecedented socio-political change ("Manifesto", 4)? These questions will be addressed in each Chapter of this dissertation.

In *How Immigration Became Illegal*, Aviva Chomsky explores how illegality and "undocumentedness" are calculated socio-political inventions generated to facilitate exploitation and exclusion of Latino immigrants. Yet, in an era when political correctness has been well

established and oft employed in the public discursive arena, it is curious that such deliberate and premeditated marginalization could possibly be permitted to occur. Why is there not the same reactionary outrage when Mexican nationals and/or Mexican immigrants are publicly targeted by individuals such as then-Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump when, on June 17th 2015, he referred to (all) Mexicans as "rapists", "drug dealers", and "murders" the day after announcing he intended to run for office (Eleveld)? Or on January 6, 2016 when another former Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz, himself the son of a Cuban immigrant, told Ofelia Valdez, an undocumented DREAMer who works with special needs children, that he would promptly and urgently deport her without hesitation once in office since she broke the law[1,2]? (Gamboa).

As Chomsky points out, while "in the era of colorblindness, it is no longer permissible to hate blacks [or other minority ethnic groups]…we can hate criminals" (17). By generating a threat narrative around *indocumentados* that inundates nearly all national dialogue about Mexicans/Mexican immigrants in the U.S., their entire persona is one of lawbreakers and criminal activity. It then becomes "permissible" for the general public to disparage this group and advocate for their exclusion, incarceration, and/or removal. Indeed, with such over- and mis-representation, it is an apt conclusion that in the first quarter of the twenty-first century "being Mexican makes you somehow more undocumented" (Chomsky 88).

[1] Valdez is able to work legally in the U.S. despite being undocumented due to President Barack Obama's 2012 executive order, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA).
[2] Curious to note is how while the first mention of *illegals* in Republican narrative was in 1980, it was not until 1996 that Democrats first used the term in any public or meaningful way (Nevins 139-140).

The notion of producing an illegal (Latino) immigrant "as a threat to the country's socio-cultural and political framework" is corroborated by Joseph Nevins in his book, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond*. Here he offers an account of how the shift in thinking of the U.S.-Mexican divide as a border to a boundary in the 1990s resulted in a level of division, rebuffing, and separation that contradicted the long history of "cooperation across the international divide that [had] long been a hallmark of border life" (55). The shift essentially added more fuel to the narrative fire by "distinguishing between those who belong [and under what conditions] and those who do not [according to ambiguous and arbitrary reasons at best]" (65). This move evoked a process of "Demexicanization" in which the border became more of an aggressive, politicized, and reactionary physical dividing line from the 1970s onward. The result is an additional imaginary border separating distinct categories (pure versus impure, virtuous versus sinful, etc.), and greatly contributes to the sharp rise in public sentiment in favor of Latino immigration restriction and the resurgence of the "crisis perspective" surrounding the Latino presence in the U.S. today (Nevins 141, 143). In examining such an intentional construction of Mexican (il)legality, and in an effort to address the "why?" factor, there appears to be an emerging acknowledgement towards the responsibility of "raising a generation without documents", a historically unprecedented group that "have a completely different life experience" than other immigrant groups (Chomsky, "How Immigration" 168). What is curious to examine, and is a primary objective of this dissertation, is how this "other otherness" is expressed in the cultural production arena, and to what end.

While many would seek to maintain the Latino threat narrative to marginalize and exclude Mexican immigrants, a "Hispanic impact" or "Hispanic effect" is an undeniable cultural

consequence of U.S.-Mexican proximity and trans-borderness. Jorge Ramos observes that by the early 2000's, "[t]he only thing that is missing is for them [Latinos] to present themselves and to open up a conversation with the American public. They need to have an opportunity through the media to get to know the American people [and vice versa]" (99). I seek to illustrate that this representation is now occurring, and that the identity being expressed is a nuanced transnational amalgamation, a new sociocultural space, that reveals how "we [Mexican nationals and illegal Mexican immigrants] are changing the U.S…but the U.S. is also changing us" (Ramos 94).

Many examples have emerged out of millennial Mexican cultural production that speak to a more "artistic" combative strategy gaining traction where the organized national efforts have not. These alternative methods, or rather the tweaks millennial cultural producers and consumers have made to both existing and innovative mediums, reach "the people" since they are a driving part of popular culture dissemination and consumption. Chapter One surveys the scope of which socio-political narratives that relate to contemporary happenings between the U.S. and Mexico are promulgated by the Mexican periodicals *El Norte*, *Mural*, and *Reforma*, and deliberates what types of re-casted narratives are revealed within deliberate headline jargon.

Chapter Two switches gears to delve into literature. The works of Juan Villoro and Luis Alberto Urrea, representatives of the millennial Mexican gaze inward and upward, explore internal dichotomies within Mexico and examine what might compromise *lo mexicano* in the twenty-first century. The figure of the U.S.-Mexican border moves beyond an emblem of physical boundary between two nations to be considered as representative of re-casted and re-negotiated internal socio-cultural contradictions as well. Within the realm of contemporary Latino-centric literature, *Se habla español: Voces latinas en USA served* as a vital launching pad

for the issues and themes explored in Chapter Two to blossom. Edmundo Paz Soldán and Alberto Fuguet have made a pivotal contribution with this compilation of short stories. Their objectives are twofold: to examine what it means to be *latinoamericano* and to assess such an identity as part of a "new" generation (14). The diversity of Latino/a experience in the U.S. connects with a previously mentioned notion that there is concurrent cultural influence taking place as a result of the "Hispanic effect" and increasing "Latinization" of the U.S. Soldán and Fuguet pose the provoking question, would it actually be possible nowadays to truly have nothing to do with the USA (14)? As they say, "el olor de los Estados Unidos lo ha invadido todo", followed with the surprising reassurance that "esto no debería asustarnos" (15). They embrace the cultural amalgamation that has occurred, and that will only continue to as demographic projections of an eventual Hispanic majority come to fruition in the U.S. Rather than reject this amalgamation, they seek to identify the "new wave" of (millennial) writers who represent an identity "que oliera a french fries, buttered popcorn and Sloppy Joes pero también a burritos, productos Goya, smoothies de mango-guayaba y Häagen-Dazs de dulce de leche" (15), essentially what twenty-first century Mexican immigrants in the U.S. are.

Soldán and Fuguet indicate that a certain literary tradition has been prevalent in Anglo representations of transplanting a (white) local to a new, exotic (Latino) place: "el gringo perdido/atrapado/seducido", which has in turn created a depth of stereotypes that are frequently relied on in character development (17). They posit turning this trip around and looking at from the opposite side: "al latinoamericano perdido/atrapado/seducido", and request that at the end, there be more truths than stereotypes (17). As they point out, what is the value in "fighting" one stereotype with another? Would it be possible to imagine the U.S., and the Latino experience in

thereof, in its own terms (18)? After all, "una cosa está clara: no se puede hablar de Latinoamérica sin incluir a los Estados Unidos. Y *no se puede concebir a los Estados Unidos sin pensar en América Latina* (19, emphasis mine). In the literary fiction examples of primary interest for this project (the short stories "Mariachi" and "Amigos mexicanos", and the novel *Into the Beautiful North*), this conjecture is at the forefront of analysis in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three addresses the musical tradition of *narco corridos*, specifically those which comprise the sub-genre of the particularly macabre and bombastic *movimiento alterado*. During the investigative process for this chapter, it was obvious that the emergence of such niches in response to socio-cultural needs and mindsets are typical of the broader *corrido* genre, and that the *movimiento alterado* niche was still a bit of an outlier. "Hero *corridos*", in which a larger than life Mexican figure "defies" cowardly Anglo "lowmen" (Peña), are another example of such a thematic niche. While this type of *corrido* was prevalent during earlier twentieth century periods of contact, it nevertheless illustrates how important it became for migrating Mexicans to develop and propagate a resolute cultural figure that could serve as a counterculture reference point.

One well-known example of such a figure is found in the hero *corrido Gregorio Cortez,* based on the real-life Gregorio Cortez Lira, a farmer turned outlaw who successfully evaded Anglo authorities for twelve days despite massive efforts to capture him. This hero *corrido* became a token symbol for Mexicans of the tension and antagonism between both sides of the border. By examining twentieth century hero *corridos* against twenty-first century *narco corridos*, I was able to uncover how contemporary interpretations of such a protagonist figure is realized by millennial composers, performers, and consumers. Such a comparison is especially intriguing when considered along with Manuel Peña's assertion that "[t]he hero corrido peaked in

the early twentieth century when Mexican Americans [and Mexicans] reached the lowest point in their history of oppression in the U.S." (297). It is arguable that those decades were not the lowest point of oppression since many of the practices enacted during these first fifteen years of the millennium have had much more severe social and political consequences and placed a significant strain on trans-border relations.

At their most basic interpretation, hero *corridos* illustrate two main points: being lost in a maze of labels (Mexican versus American, immigrant versus citizen, working versus middle class), and a quest for self-definition and reinforcement. How does this same "quest" manifest in the twenty-first century? What identifier(s) could be added in the exploration of self-definition (Mexican, *valiente,* DREAMer, *indocumentado*, *narco,* etc.), and is the same hierarchy of labels applicable? Such questions are addressed in the contemporary reiterations and re-workings of the lyrical, performative, and consumptive foundation originally established by hero *corridos*/characters. The titilating of the genre by the popular *movimiento alterado* group BuKnas de Culiacán is of particular interest. It is the intent of the discussion to consider this particular group's songwriting and performance styles against the notion of internally (within Mexico) and externally (within the U.S.) re-casted narratives of self. An ethical conundrum about duplicity and socio-cultural deception emerges.

Chapter Four homes in on Mexican political cartoons produced by illustrator Paco Calderón for *El Norte, Reforma,* and *Mural* (the three periodicals discussed in Chapter One), to examine how these compact, visually stimulating, and easily digestible snippets leverage a greater latitude to take on conservative, traditional, and/or established ideas than do other cultural products. Cartooning has a long history of socio-political involvement in Mexico and as such is a

vital partner to the other cultural products examined in this project that exhibit demonstrable oppositionality, re-negotiation, and re-casting of internal and external narratives.

Finally, Chapter Five returns us to the millennial Mexican community within the U.S. where the topic of (il)legality is examined. It would be difficult to believe that an immigrant generation experiencing as much tumult as the DREAMers would not produce art in some fashion that speaks to their experiences with twofold exclusion and belonging. In the article, "Artists Raise Your Weapons", Stephanie McMillan would have art serve as the primary vehicle to combat what she sees as an "imperialist war" and an inundation of vapid narcissism represented by an entire genre that has emerged via social media (Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, etc.) that are "tepid", "meaningless" and "fake". With a sense of palpable urgency, she takes note of an escalating exploitation taking place that upon consideration could easily be re-directed to hone in on the Mexican immigrant experience. She encourages the exploited ones to leverage art as a cultural weapon to (finally) instigate much-needed resistance. Artistic "activists" need to be prepared for the predictable reaction by the dominant culture, which, as McMillan explains, is a childish form of ignoring or disregarding in an effort to avoid and/or distract from the cause.

She decries the tradition of "snub[bing], ignor[ing], or condem[ing] to obscurity" socio-political artistic efforts and evokes a rallying cry to create and distribute art that simultaneously "exposes and denounces" while it "celebrates and contributes". In this rallying call to action, McMillan essentially describes a niche of artistic expression referred to as "action art". It has been my experience that action art often alternates between subtle and blatant socio-politically centric contexts (i.e., civil rights struggles, issues with immigration, discrimination, and

economic challenges) that have become so troubling and continuous for the "sufferer" that the circumstances "have infiltrated their consciousness" (McMillan1-2).

Pondering McMillan's call to action together with the notion of action art as applicable twenty-first century millennial, undocumented, Mexican immigrant-centric materials has led to an additional consideration instigated by Hector Amaya: the notions of "performing acculturation" and "performing self". Amaya, himself a Mexican immigrant, suggests that Latino (Mexican) immigration in the U.S. represents "a radical rewriting of the self" as a result of turning the process of acculturation into a literal process of dramatization and impersonation (194). As he explains, "the immigrant must engage in a reflexive process of transformation that can serve our integration and increase our chan[c]es of success" (194). This process must begin for the immigrant with the "fundamental question: 'What kind of personal characteristics ought I have to be treated ethically by others?'" (195) to minimize the unavoidable struggles with "unjust American institutions", "generally unfriendly culture", and "mistreatment from nonimmigrants" that a (Mexican) immigrant will encounter in his "journey" towards personal and economic resettlement (195). This premise relies upon Foucault's idea that,

> While in the country of origin, the individual's interior culture (subjectivity) is in relative harmony with external culture, in a new country the external culture is disjointed from the subject's interiority…Immigration [therefore] forces the individual to engage in acculturation by radically rewriting the self and changing the way the self is performed…or lose hope of ever experiencing again the type of interactions that gave meaning to herself/himself while growing up (198-200).

Amaya grew up as a Mexican, but interestingly feels he has “become a Latino” after moving to the U.S. and that his “Latinidad” is in a constant “state of becoming” (200). This reminds of Jorge Ramos’ assertion that “there are no Latinos living outside of the U.S. By definition, a Latino is someone who was born in Latin America, but currently lives in the U.S.” (“Latino Wave” xx). Amaya curiously notes that each year he has found “more kinship with those Latinas(os) growing up here” (in the U.S.) (200), which suggests that U.S.-born Latinos (or DREAMers, whose entire formative years took place in the U.S.) possess a different type of “Latinidad” than Amaya, a Mexican who immigrated as an adult.

Amaya offers a detailed discussion of how impactful the element of race has been in his process of renegotiating self (a theme discussed at length by Chavez, Chomsky, Golash-Boza, and Guitérrez, “Walls and Mirrors”, and that is discussed in Chapters One and Two). In Mexico, he was “seen as dark enough as to evince an Indian origin, but white enough to signify some Europeanness”, which in turn firmly positioned him in a particular niche of the social landscape and structured his life options accordingly (202). However, in the U.S., Amaya’s racial complexion has been boiled down to one element and one element only, that he is a “nonwhite male” carrying the skin tone of “brownness” that is “likely read as transgressive, as extreme masculinity, and as unclean”, positioning him instead in a vast lumped-together community of “others” that he, frankly, “feels uneasy about representing” (203).

This immediate and inflexible knee-jerk categorization of “brownness”, and its corresponding undesirable associations, illustrate Chavez’s Latino Threat Narrative in action. Amaya’s most effective tool to combat a social appointment that he resented and to not succumb to the narrative that attempted to control all of his options was to “perform” similarities with

upper middle class, educated, and white communities to obtain a type of cultural citizenship that would in turn lead to access, stability, and acceptance (208). By all accounts, employing performative tactics has proven successful for Amaya as he is currently a doctorate holding Professor of Media Studies and Department Chair at the University of Virginia.

One particular area of millennial cultural production seems to uniquely and effectively meet the parameters set forth by McMillan while also exemplifying many of the themes discussed above (creating and/or combating deliberately constructed narratives, flaunting an "American" or "Mexican" caricature, involving the undocumented Latino experience, renegotiating self, etc.) - - memes - - and will be the subject of Chapter Five. This chapter seeks to examine what is problematic about the nomenclature of the "DREAMer", "illegal", and "undocumented" titles. Is it deceptively preventative for those twenty-first century Mexican millennials who attempt to assimilate and integrate into mainstream U.S. social order? Is exploitation, or even commodification, an increasing by-product of the DREAMer label, and the group's political and cultural negotiations (or even contra-negotiations) in the twenty-first century? As this demographic of immigrant is unique for a variety of reasons that will be discussed, the social media and Internet-based memetic cultural production that Mexican DREAMer millennials are using to negotiate a presence and confront the jargon above will be of particular interest to examine.

Chapter One

Border Crossing Narratives in Mexican *Titulares*

Fig. 1. UndocuMedia Facebook Post on 26 January 2017.

This chapter explores the extent to which socio-political narratives about the U.S. and Mexico are circulated via print media outlets in Mexico, and questions if calculated jargon and imagery are orchestrated and distributed to serve national socio-political interests. It asks whether discursive formations represented by newspaper headlines function as a type of conformist, antipathetic, reproachful, and/or reclamative narrative producer that generates a particular U.S. character and sentiments in the same manner that the "Latino Threat Narrative", theorized by Leo Chavez, produces self-serving iterations of *Latino* (specifically Mexican) personification in the U.S. It is the intent of this chapter to outline what function headline jargon serves in Mexican narrative arenas, and to explore whether they challenge the U.S., reconstitute a Mexican identity, or establish completely different priorities and socio-political agendas. Specific deliberation of Mexican print media geared towards a Mexican audience is absent from discussions on how the LTN and its apparent counter-narrative effort operate, nor has much research been undertaken to

examine possible *gringo* antipathetic, reproachful, and/or *Mexicanosmosis* reclamative narratives based on Mexican print media geared towards a Mexican audience.

In the U.S.-produced LTN, fueled by a generally white nationalist perspective, Latinos are depicted as an enemy to social and economic institutions (a "U.S. first and only" mindset, if you will). An examination of periodical headlines demonstrates how the status of "anti-immigrant" rhetoric (fueled by misinformation) on the U.S. side of the border parallels the escalation of a carrot-and-stick narrative sprinkled with increasing indignation (yet powered by fact rather than falsehood) on the Mexican side.[3] In this way, the latter demonstrates an alternative iteration of how the threat narrative theory has manifested in the southern sphere of public rhetoric production and distribution: the constantly encroaching, always mendacious, and increasingly belligerent *gringo* menace on Mexican potential for domestic and international improvement and prosperity.

In an effort to highlight the features of the Mexican rhetoric between 2000-2015 as compared to that which was propagated by U.S. print newspaper media during the same period of time, I have examined U.S. headlines against Mexican counterparts. A contrasted yet intertwined dialogue emerges with one side (the U.S.) remaining reticent while the other (Mexico) becomes more embittered and uninhibited. The result is a sense that a U.S. political and social audience at most flippantly humors the concerns, demands, and repudiations voiced in periodicals such as *El Norte, Mural*, and *Reforma* insomuch as a parent might engage with a child prone to outbursts. This is unfortunate for a variety of reasons, most especially due to the accuracy with which much of the Mexican reporting is brought to the public early on, and the glaringness of U.S.

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[3] And corresponding visual aids in the form of political cartoons; see Chapter Four.

predictability with topics such as border control, immigration reform, and treatment of immigrants.

The year 2000 was selected as the starting focal date to examine as it fell one year before the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, i.e. before the subsequent schizophrenic policy changes to immigration and the escalation of public terrorism fears in the U.S. The year 2000 is also well after NAFTA had been entrenched,Operation Gatekeeper (and the like) had been carried out,and the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act had long been engrained.These particular events were arguably the most contributory to creating an environment in which anti-Latino rhetoric in the U.S. would remain at a constant boil as the millennium began. Indeed, an intense "rhetoric of exclusion" and "public anxiety over immigration and related issues of multiculturalism, [Latino] race, and national identity [security]" had been decisively established by the year 2000 as a direct consequence of the above-mentioned historical moments (Chavez, "Covering Immigration", 8, 12).

I. Origins and Geographies of a Political Narrative

To say that the relationship between Mexico and the United States has been fraught with complexity and duplicity would be an understatement that broached on trivializing, particularly towards the former of these two national associates forced into correlation by geography and history. On the northern side of the border, perspectives of the "Mexican Other" have become remarkably stunted into a few generalized caricatures about Mexican peoples that are reinforced by media and political dialogue: drug smugglers, female breeders (with the sole objective of birthing an "anchor baby"), nationalists bent on invading and reconquering lost lands, imbecilic manual laborers, and freeloaders (Bebout 33-106, Chavez, 1-12, 80-81; Chomsky, "How

Immigration" 87-112; Morris 17-25). Perhaps most unexpected during the investigative process for this project is how anti-Mexican cautionary propaganda in the U.S. is nearly identical in rhetoric, presentation, and distribution in the late nineteenth century, throughout the twentieth century, and now again in the first quarter of the twenty-first century (Bebout 33-106, Chavez, Guitérrez, "Walls and Mirrors", Nevins).

This is surprising when one compares the more than one hundred and fifty year duration of these distorted labels to other immigrant groups that also encountered intervals of racism and/or ethnic backlash at the start of their migration and settlement, yet abated over time (Chavez 33, Chomsky, "How Immigration" 42-48).[4] In attempting to address why such narrative stunting has occurred, it is a pertinent observation that within the U.S. "representations of Mexico [and] Mexicans...are deployed to construct white identity, or more accurately white identity as American identity" (Bebout 2). Over and over again, the legacies and discursive traditions of which Latino-centric threat narratives are drawn from have been ones that consistently endeavor to "naturalize whiteness" and radicalize (Mexican) brownness (Bebout 2).

Howard Campbell tests this widely acknowledged notion of endemic ethnically driven "otherness" that has long been a staple of U.S.-Mexican narrative typecasts (particularly those that essentialize either group into mutually hostile competitors that are irreconcilably different). Campbell views the trend of discussing ethnic, cultural, and national representations in a manner that maintains segregation from one another as preventative to fostering a discursive arena in which border-crossing is viewed as steadily multi-directional, resulting in a more mutual

[4] Other immigrant groups such as German, Polish and Italian. The obvious exception to a lessening of immigrant-directed racism and ethnic backlash would be African Americans.

interethnic cultural interaction than is typically considered. Such reciprocation has long been concealed by problematizing intra-border and inter-cultural relationships and perpetuating notions of necessary inevitable isolation that have led to the fossilization of ideas that one nation (U.S.) has harbored a much stronger influence over the other (Mexico) during formative, identity-centric moments. Essentially, Campbell has injected the stance that "the Anglo" and "the Mexican" are mutual constructions representative of asymmetrical power relations (26).[5]

He is correct that investigation is well established that focuses on what comprises a stereotypical "*mexicano*" persona within U.S. public rhetoric and literary mediums.[6] More challenging to determine are the Mexican constructive equivalents according to millennial *mexicano* periodical print culture in response to the unscrupulous U.S. discursive stratagems such as threat narratives, "otherness" relegation, and historiographical white-washing. Yet while Campbell's stance is intriguing to consider alongside these stratagems, it becomes increasingly difficult to visualize mutuality when examining the periodical content of interest for this chapter. It also neglects to acknowledge how the concept of origin has informed a significant portion of *mexicanidad* exploration, and how rife twentieth and twenty-first century Mexican cultural production have been with internal and external "otherness".

Lee Bebout takes a significant step in examining the consequences that result from a saturated distribution of Anglo-American led narratives that have historically almost exclusively perceived "The Mexican" as an "Other". Still, much of the discussion in his critical book

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[5] Curiously, Campbell makes a point to emphasize that the "purpose of [his] article is not to deny racial divisions, but to illustrate the complexities…in which Mexicans and Anglos construct and borrow culturally from each other. This research shows how border-crossing is not in one direction only, but includes cultural Mexicanisation of Anglos as well" (25).
[6] See Bebout, Chavez, Morris, Saldaña-Portillo.

Whiteness on the Border centers on examining the intersections of a Mexican-American (Chicano) and U.S.-based racial and national niche of the purpose-driven narrative concept. As such, the objective of this chapter is to counter the absence of a *mexicano* consideration created from within Mexico and gazing upwards.

A historiographical consideration proves useful in this undertaking. By examining the narrative histories of the United States and Mexico under the guise of formations of "self" and "identity" (how they came to be), it becomes clear early on that both are heavily influenced by their respective geographies, or rather the manner in which U.S. and Mexican physiographics have been manufactured through historical, social, and racial factors. Representations are politically motivated as well, an additional element with tremendous socio-psychological implications of how the "Other" (side) is conditioned with the assistance of textual mediums such as newspaper headlines to be perceived and to perceive.

The notion of representation is particularly key in embarking on an examination of the Mexican inward/upward gaze since it manifests quite distinctly from its northern neighbor. In *Indian Giver: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States*, Saldaña-Portillo begins a process of assertive identity interrogation from the outset by naming the book with the disparaging expression "Indian Giver". It facilitates an immediate dialogue about perceptions, accuracies, and misrepresentations of "self" versus "other" in these two nations, out of which emerges a clearer picture as to how present-day narratives have been, in essence, fortified despite decades and multiple generations.

Saldaña-Portillo explains that an "Indian giver is someone who takes back something they have willingly given or sold" (12). She connects such conduct directly with how white colonists

duplicitously behaved towards Native Americans, particularly during the early stages of settlement. While Anglo-American history tends to obscure this, Mexican historiography more forthrightly acknowledges the manner with which indigenous populations were divested of lands by conquistadors, a truth that is "constantly, reiteratively affirmed and projected" within communal forums (Saldaña-Portillo 12).[7] This stresses two important divergences of historiographical behavior - - the U.S. tendency to falsify and opaquely tuck away versus the Mexican tendency to exhibit - - that provoke questions as to how such comfort with exhibition has impacted an internal ability to visualize broad space-making projects in a purely Mexican geography.[8] In other words, how do Mexicans "see" Mexicans and "interpret" historiographies against contemporary iterations of intermixing cross-border "self" and "other"?

Saldaña-Portillo elucidates by borrowing from Octavio Paz, who branded "all" Mexicans as being "Hijos de la Malinche"; all are "the sons of mother-Malinche, who he characterizes as the victim of violation, of a fraud" (12-13). Under such guise, the Mexican idiom *hijo de la chingada* then implies a much more profound sense of defilement and ignominy than the Spanish equivalent, *hijo de puta*. A *puta*, while generally observed as a debased profession, suggests that the woman maintains even the most miniscule amount of volition in her harlotry while *chingada*, with translations consisting of both literal fornication and a figurative bamboozle and/or

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[7] This does not mean that Mexico has been "free of discrimination", but rather attempts to imply that the manifestation of racial discrimination is "significantly different from that in the United States" (Bebout 27). There are most definitely contradictory ideals in Mexico reminiscent of *chingón*/*hijo de la chingada*, a paradox of which is best summarized by Bebout: "The Indian is at once summoned to appear everywhere as the *foundation* of Mexican character and instructed to disappear into the more perfect union of mestizaje" (27).

[8] This difference, and its narrative effect, will become evident through an examination of headline language and verbiage behavior in section II.

disconcertment,[9] concedes nothing voluntarily. Thus, an *hijo de la chingada* (“all” *mexicanos*) has much less agency than an *hijo de puta* because they were conceived from an act of total forced occupation, a raping of the corporeal in equal part to the landscape.

It is the latter that is necessary to consider here. If Mexican territory is conceived of as mother-Malinche, and the “stripping open” promulgated by the “masculine agency of the Spaniard” is superimposed over the land, then it becomes easy to see how the products of the violation (the sons, the future generations) are “consequently engendered as humiliated, enraged, and brutish subjects” (Saldaña-Portillo 13). While Paz generalizes that “*all* Mexicans are *hijos de la chingada*/sons of the fucked one”, Saldaña-Portillo also adds that “[a]t the same time, because all Mexicans are also engendered by the Spaniards who raped and conquered, the hijo de la chingada also contains within himself the one who rapes, the *chingón*” (13). This presents a complex personal (the literal) and geographical (the figurative) duality of simultaneously co-existing as mother-Malinche and father-chingón, or progeny of the rapist and the one who rapes. Present day motivations behind selective and calculated verbiage seen in Mexico-based headline textual production are enveloped in this paradox of self-identifying as “equally injured by/responsible for/born of colonialism” and reveal a “historical anxiety” about having been equally “defrauded and defrauder” (Saldaña-Portillo 14).[10]

The implication that Mother Malinche is the veritable progenitor of *el pueblo mexicano* and *la patria mexicana*, and that she has been the victim of both corporal and territorial violation,

[9] To be “fucked”, to be “fucked over”, for a situation to be “fucked up”.

[10] This is perhaps the angle most lacking in the previously mentioned perspective held by Campbell that “who” each nation/national is to itself and to one another is a mutually perpetuated and beneficial exchange.

injects a strong dynamic of the female into the topic of national narrative development and consumption. Interestingly, and most relevant for the periodical focus of this chapter, Cristina D. Ramírez has uncovered ample evidence that early twentieth century Mexican women journalists profoundly partook in the development and consolidation of a post-Malinche, even post-revolution, Mexican national discursive identity (though such contributions have been unsurprisingly overlooked).

The women-led literary genre is aptly labeled by Ramírez as the "Mestiz@ Rhetoric".[11] Mexican women journalists writing and publishing during the transitional early twentieth century occupied the "center of the transnational experience – as female pioneers…writing from a standpoint of inclusion that was resistant to oppressive ideologies" (Ramírez 606). Their rhetorical objectives were two-fold: first, to give voice to those who simultaneously identified with indigenous, Mexican, and Western sensibilities (i.e., those "hijos de la chingada" whose psyche was still permeated with the heritage duality of "chingada" [Mexican] and the "chingón" [Anglo and/or Spanish European]). These writers openly and purposefully acknowledge the "multiple subjectivities" from which they originated with the intent to create a space representative of an existence that had long been deferred between two dueling worlds. Second, they sought to boldly counteract the "repression of women's voices in public", birthing the

[11] The "@" symbol is the newest realization of efforts to confront the gender exclusivity of Spanish language grammar that traditionally has reverted to masculine lexeme formations for the universal ("lo mestizo", for example). Ramírez's use of the "@" is the word "mestiz@" suggests a lexical strategy to confront a patriarchal language norm. While in many discursive forums, anti-sexist lexeme manipulations such as the "@" (or even its cousin the "x" to indicate non-binary gender identification) are accepted, as recently as 2017 the conservative Real Academia Española has rejected its use (Vargas).

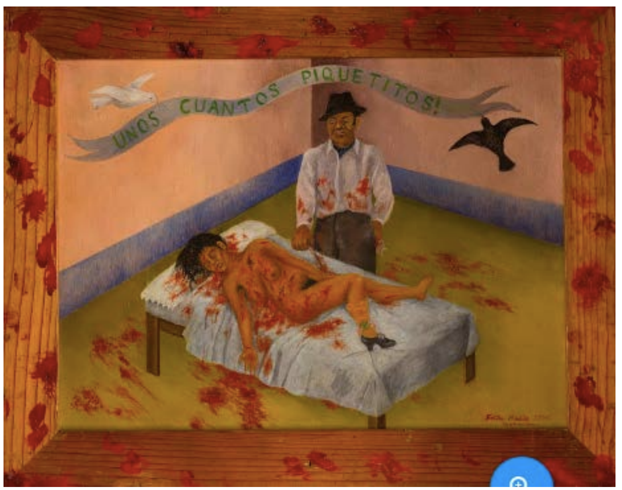
mestiz@ rhetoric to infiltrate the national dialogue and carve out their own influential space (Ramírez 607).

Curiously, as part of mestiz@ narrative and rhetorical strategy, early twentieth century Mexican women journalists articulated *mestizaje* in a transnational manner: using Aztec localities to title texts, employing native aliases on publications, and using European theories to communicate the mestiz@ vision of Mexico (Ramírez 607). Scholars such as José Vasconcelo and John Francis Burke make the case that such strategies were transnational in nature for the manner with which they crossed and re-mixed cultural and physical boundaries, that they mixed Anglo with the indigenous in a mutually beneficial way. This hails back to the previously discussed argument made by Campbell, yet it is the opinion of Ramírez that while Mexican women writers perhaps employed European/Anglo rhetorical strategies, they did so in a calculated manner to counter the "patriarchal and colonial powers that sought to inscribe them" (608). In other words, they leveraged transitional discursive tools to secure a place in a public arena that had previously overlooked or heavily engendered their discursive participation and identities, and to elicit a new responsive mechanism that simultaneously embraced and recast the *chingada* and *chingón* as a "multilayered symbolic act of resistance" (Ramirez 611).

At a time of such social and political turmoil, aspects of such resistance "entangle[d] the women in a rhetorical conundrum of gender and national identification", one of which highlighted how on one side of the coin, women had a foot in a world that valued and demanded subordinate female domesticity, while on the other side, a world of intellectual emancipation

(Ramírez 611, 615).[12] They embraced this entanglement to brazenly challenge discursive boundaries that had become representative of intra and inter-national border contestations (internally in regard to race, gender, and politics, and externally with race, territory, and citizenry).

Early mestiz@ rhetoric led efforts to symbolically emancipate Malinche, a desire of which has long been a fixation within Mexican rhetorical production as well as other cultural mediums worthy of mention. Both Friday Kahlo's 1935 painting "Unos cuantos piquetitos" and her 1944 "La columna rota" speak towards a conscious and subconscious effort and desire to exorcise the cursed dual *chingada* and *chingón* (as seen in Figure 2), and to, often times, do so existing in an excruciatingly raw paralyzed state with profound stoicism (evidenced in Figure 3).



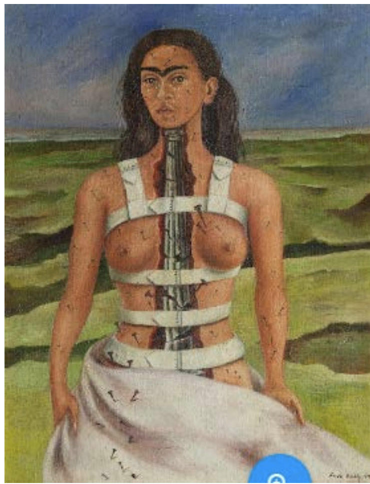


Fig. 2. *Unos cuantos piquetitos* by Frida Kahlo (1935). From Google Arts & Culture.

Fig. 3. *La columna rota* by Frida Kahlo (1944). From Google Arts & Culture.

[12] See the 1915 text *La Mujer Moderna* that encouraged female political participation in a variety of non-domestic roles and to a vocal extreme of which had not previously been seen in Mexican rhetoric.

Gloria Anzaldúa's momentous text 1987 *Borderlands: La Frontera, the New Mestiza* also confronts gender, territorial, and sexual border and boundaries resultant of the *chingada/chingón* existence and the desire to towards self (and thereby communal) emancipation. Additionally, Mexico-based photographers Raechel Running and Odette Barajas, painters Jaqueline Barajas and Irma Nava, among many others,[13] continue such efforts in the twenty-first century.

Devising the Threat

Returning to the topic of narrative construction and its calculated self-serving motives, physical geographies that were claimed to be their own by these two nations are inherently derivative from a process of racializing space. Viewing land, territory, borders, and the like as artificial constructions encouraged by racial motivations underscores the point that "racial geography is a technology [a calculation] of power...[a] series of techniques used to produce space [and ownership/rights to access] in racial terms" (Saldaña-Portillo 17). Yet how to visualize the parameters of such boundaries when physical barriers are not (and were not) always present? Brief, easily consumable, word-based mediums in particular have proved wildly useful in this particular endeavor, acutely so in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries with the advent and mass proliferation of social media information sharing.[14]

In his texts *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation* and *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*, Leo Chavez reveals the crucial role that popular print media has played in the creation of a stereotypical Mexican in the broad U.S. socio-cultural public consciousness, and demonstrates how textual mediums are one

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[13] These artists and many more are highlighted in Stefan Falke's photography book compilation and exhibit *la frontera: artists along the u.s.-mexican border*.
[14] See Chapter Five.

of the most effective tools to bolster fear-mongered racialized space. While both books are exemplary in their consideration of the calculated constructions broadcasted via U.S. print media, it fails to consider that which is produced in Mexico and whether it has had an equally as deliberate position in propagating a specific narrative towards Mexico's *gringo* northern neighbor. As Chavez defines the theory:

> The [LTN] posits that Latinos are not like previous immigrant groups, who ultimately became part of the nation…Latinos are [depicted as] *unwilling* or *incapable* of integrating…part of an *invading* force from south of the border that is bent on conquering land that was formerly theirs (the U.S. Southwest) and *destroying* the American way of life ("Latino Threat" 3, emphasis mine).

Chavez's systematic examination of twentieth century U.S. popular media forums concludes, "being 'Mexican looking' was enough to create the message that Latino immigrants represented a problem" ("Latino Threat" 2), even when ample research and evidence has proven the unqualified opposite in regard to jobs, economic contribution, linguistic and cultural immersion, and national security (Chomsky, "How Immigration" and "Jobs"; Golash-Boza; Ramos, "Country" and "The Latino Wave"). Substantiated evidence is not sufficient to change the tone of public reaction or stance, or diminish gullibility, since the LTN "…is a narrative that is, in some important ways, similar to religious faith, in that its adherents are not necessarily concerned with the verifiability of its premises" ("Latino Threat" 71). Winifred Johnston notes how such blind susceptibility can be attributed to a formulaic warping of content that would stimulate "wellsprings of emotion" in a manner similar to how drama, tragedy, and spectacle saturated ballads to ensure vast circulation and popularity by hitting an emotional (as opposed to rational)

nerve in the public psyche (119). While ballads occupy a different narrative genre, the lyrical embellishments highlighted by Johnston can certainly be transposed to forms of media like newspapers or, even more to the point for this chapter, newspaper headlines.

What Chavez terms as "media-infused spectacles" are the tools with which the narrative of threat, nuisance, and danger are both created and disseminated. These spectacles objectify Latinos by diminishing, or even entirely eliminating, their humanity to turn "them" into "objects" with the ultimate premeditated intent to cultivate a lack of empathy on behalf of the general (and assumingly uninformed) U.S. public. Thus, the focus is solely on the (imaginary and/or hyperbolized) threat imposed by Latino presence, heightened by a frenzied need to get "them" out and to keep "them" out (even if it was by way of U.S. policy that "they" were either brought in or encouraged to come).

The factual social, political, or economic motivators that would cause one to flee their home nation are not included in the principal rhetoric, nor is an accurate detailing of what is encountered during a border-crossing migration attempt (rape, theft, beatings, dismemberment, etc.), or the familial hardship caused by separation that is often endured for decades (i.e., issues of humane humanitarian importance). In fact, somewhat surprisingly when one considers how long migration has been occurring between the U.S. and Mexico, the severe emotional and psychological impact of familial separation that results when children or adolescents remain in Mexico while the parent(s) or other influential family member migrates north are only recently beginning to be understood.[15]

[15] Refer to the 2010 UNICEF social and economic policy working paper by Rodolfo de la Garza, "Migration, Development, and Children Left Behind: A Multidimensional Perspective".

Several strategies are employed to craft the specific spectacle needed to secure and perpetuate the anxiety-peddling LTN message. Boiled down to its most rudimentary elements, particular scaremonger or doomsayer themes are selected with the intent to exploit throughout as many public forums as possible. *Foreign*, *invasion,* and *predator* are three of many verbiage examples that could be selected. "Simple dichotomies" - - us/them, invaded/invaders, victims/destroyers, legitimate/illegal, and citizens/non-citizens -- also exaggerate a sense of "otherness" via a careful selection of emotionally evocative words ("Latino Threat" 138). These "trigger words" become a near daily part of rhetoric delivered by both print (magazines, newspapers, blogs) and auditory outlets (radio and television talk shows, nightly news broadcasts). They are often combined with imagery designed to intensify the reader's focus on the particular LTN word(s) or phrase(s) while implanting a reactionary (but estimated) visual association. Visual caricatures that are raised upon referencing "Mexico" or "Mexican" are thus "etched in the mind's eye", consequently facilitating the cashing-in of an "ocular currency" that enables a constant and reinforcing interchange of word-to-image associations (Bebout 40).

Consider the following example, borrowed from Chapter One of *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*:

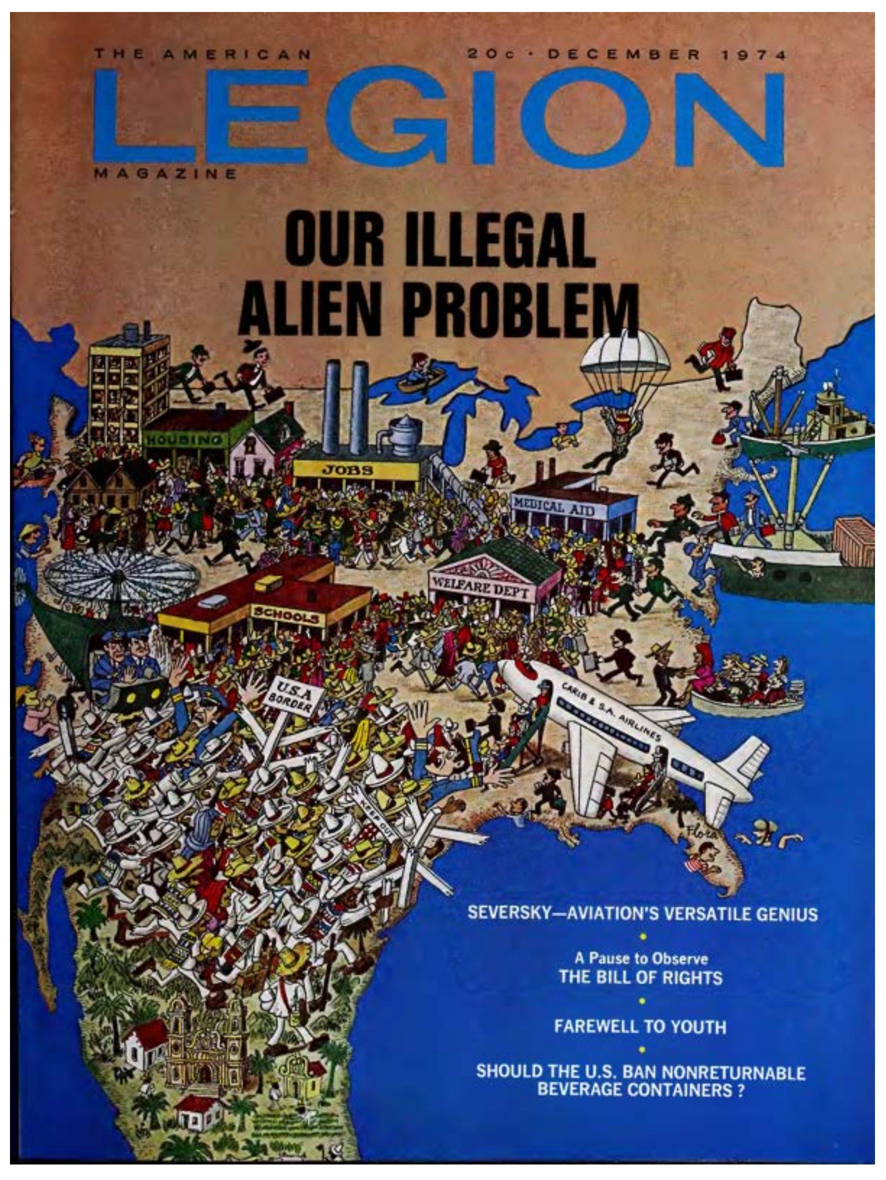

Fig. 4. American Legion Magazine, December 1974.

The words "illegal alien" directly coupled with "problem" leads the reader to assume the worst; that yes, "those [specifically Mexican] illegals" pose a threat to *me* and *mine*. Homing in on the bottom third of the cartoon image, the illustrator depicts a mob of Mexican nationals nearly identical in appearance running and pushing their way across the border, inundating the schools and welfare programs, seizing available jobs, and swamping housing sectors throughout the rest

of the country. The indistinguishable nature of the Mexican nationals, all dressed in the same clothes with the same physical features (and curiously, all appearing to be men), eliminates any possibility of identity or the reader connecting with any aspect of their individuality.
While this example hails from a 1974 publication, the LTN strategy based on jargon manipulation coupled with visual correlation has not deviated into the twenty-first century.

In early 2016, then-Republican Presidential Nominee Donald Trump used this tactic of employing "swarm" imagery with his first official television campaign ad:

Fig. 5. Politifact, January 2016.

The imagery in this brief video was touted as being filmed at the southern U.S.-Mexico border. Indistinct bodies move with a sporadic urgency to cross the boundary. Predictable anti-immigrant (anti-Mexico) political rhetoric is overlaid as the image plays with the intent to further entice the viewer towards believing that such irrepressible and uncontainable incidents represent the "truth" of what is happening in the "outlaw" border region. While the LTN intent is obvious, it was exposed that the video imagery in fact hails from the Italian television network RepubblicaTV,

and reports on migrants attempting to cross into Melilla, a small Spanish owned enclave on the Moroccan coast:

Fig. 6. Politifact, January 2016, "Melilla, the assault of hundreds of migrants at the Spanish border".

Notable about the LTN from a historiographical perspective is the "uncanny persistence of the barbarous Indian [Mexican]" image and problematic behavior-centric narratives between examples with a forty-two-year gap between them (1974 and 2016). A period of forty-two years spans the 1974 American Legion Magazine cover and the broadcast of the 2016 presidential campaign ad, yet the strategy and objectives are the same. If we were to jump forty-two years backwards from 1974 to 1932, or again to 1892, or even forty-two more to 1850, it would reveal mass proliferation of the same sentiments and caricatures, all propagated with the intent to evoke disparate racialized space driven by economic and politically motivated notions of proprietorship.

As appears to be evident in examining the evolution (or lack thereof) of the LTN, producing racial geographies is accomplished by constructing narratives that stoke fears of invasion, violation, loss, and trickery. An almost blasé comfort and familiarity with LTN rhetoric are indicative of a broader socio-psychological "influenza", a subtle epidemic of shared under-

the-radar hysteria towards the Mexican "Other", evidenced by U.S.-based newspaper headlines and other print media sources (Saldaña-Portillo 48, Chavez "Latino Threat").

Mexico-based newspaper headlines express a sense of incredulity and exasperation towards these infected and infectious threat narratives consumed by its northern neighbor. They invoke a type *Mexicanosmosis*, a term I have coined based on William Nericcio's theory of *Xicanomosis,* "whereby Chicana/o cultural workers [or in this case Mexicana/o]…actively work to undermine the long history of white supremacist symbolization, producing images that subvert the Mexican Other and infiltrate the eyes and minds of readers and viewers" (Bebout 48).[16] This, in turn, provides a space and creates sustainable momentum to reassume control of one's "otherness" and to redirect the course that propagated written dialogue (i.e., newspaper headlines) and resulting mental caricatures take.

As is currently recognized, the LTN is an "exploration of the Mexican image [only] in the white mind" (Bebout 42). The following analysis attempts to reveal what the contemporary *mexicano* image in the millennial Mexican mind might consist of; what the ocular currency when the gaze is shifted to an internal Mexico-on-Mexico forum, or when the gaze is shifted upwards and outwards (the gringo image according to the mind of the *hijo de la chingada,* the *chingón,* the "other"), involves for the millennial generation.

Alternative Narratives

[16] In this Chapter, resistance against the LTN narrative emerges in newspaper headlines, but this *Mexicanosmosis*/*Xicanomosis* encouragement to find "new" tools and cultural "weapons", and fight against the white and Anglo narrative is extremely evident in Chapter Five where the textual medium of interest is memes. It delves into the call for "artist-activists, armed with ink, digital animation software, and other cultural weapons, to revolt against the logics, language, and codes of white supremacy" (Bebout 48).

Mexico did not remain taciturn when confronted with the propagation of such escalated and wildly hyperbolized depictions (drug smugglers, female breeders, invaders, imbecilic laborers, and freeloaders) of Mexicans. An increase in bombastic dialogue against Mexico between the 1970s-1990s had the objective to presumably secure the assignation of Mexican immigrants as a diminutive social sect, able to be controlled at the whims of the private sector and political arena. It coincided with a Mexican PR attempt to counter the threat narrative's circulation in the U.S. Mexican-made photo exhibits, videos, and films highlighting Mexico in a positive light were produced and distributed during that period of time to directly challenge the LTN visual and written narratives (Johnson 14). In fact, "[e]mployees in Mexican government tourist offices were responsible for attending or exhibiting at conferences and giving speeches about Mexico in many U.S. cities" with nearly 90% of these activities taking place in the 1980s (Johnson 14), precisely when fear within the U.S. towards Mexicans and Mexicans immigrants was experiencing a massive resurgence.

This is tantamount to injecting an alternative de-escalation Mexi-centric narrative in the mix to counter pervasive, negative, and inaccurate images of Mexico as a nation, neighbor, and race. As Melissa Johnson explains, "[a]lthough much of 1940s-1980s media coverage of Mexico focused on problems such as student repression, immigration, and drugs…in 1983 the Mexican government paid for updates about U.S. positions…signifying that Mexico monitored U.S. positions in the region", and assumingly would adapt their public relations and media strategies accordingly (17-18). It is curious to note how much of Mexico's focus and strategy in terms of identifying target audiences came to center around political and economic power centers of the U.S. (Washington, members of Congress, U.S. agencies, etc.), or rather precisely those entities

that were deeply involved with the extreme marginalization and exclusion of Mexican immigrants in the U.S., and the instigators for the increasingly pervasive propagation of an anti-Mexican immigrant stance.

This was not the first occurrence of such misplaced or miscalculated PR effort on behalf of periodicals to redirect negative messaging. Ana María Serna details a curious event in 1918 that involved a visit to Washington D.C. by twenty editors from the top Mexican *diarios* as ambassador-type representatives with the Comité de la Información Pública. This event was touted as being of significant importance in the long history of "relaciones diplomáticas" between the two nations (Serna 208). While this vague declaration was perhaps true in the sense that some of D.C.'s most prominent political figures of the time participated in this summit, further examination of motives reveals a direct conflict for both countries that would only perpetuate the already prevalent (and increasingly fossilized) perceptions each nation held towards the other (dim-witted inferior Mexicans and bullying duplicitous Americans, the latter of which is a staple of the LTN).

On the U.S. side, "tenía como propósito utilizarlos como punta de lanza de una campaña propagandística para mejorar la imagen de los Estados Unidos en México" (Serna 208).[17] On the Mexican side, "dicha estrategía contraponía al espíritu nacionalista del gobierno de Venustiano Carranza", an administration which was vocally skeptical and opposing of its northern neighbor (Serna 208). So, on a national scale within the U.S., disparaging narratives towards Mexicans were being consumed by a public that was more than likely unaware that the comparatively small

[17] It is important to mention here that while this self-serving outreach was occurring externally, internally the circulation and stoking of the LTN was rampant.

sect of government officials were welcoming "enemy" journalists in. Nationally within Mexico, the public majority was bombarded by presidential and governmental rhetoric that reflected a long-held skepticism of U.S. motives and in fact was generally not supportive of their journalists participating in the journalistic summit (which was reported on much more extensively in Mexico than in the U.S.), let alone those from the most prominent and impactful sources of news, opinion, and propaganda.

With such internal and external tensions in mind, Serna's most important question throughout her analysis is, "¿cuál sería la contribución de la prensa Mexicana a las relaciones de México con el extranjero?" The wording of which by itself is intriguing, since it positions the U.S. as the *extranjero* (outsider/foreigner) rather than much more common opposite. In response to this question, and most relevant for the periodical content examined in this chapter, is how this early twentieth century period of time enacted fundamental changes in the behaviors of periodical reporting that are still evident today (see section II). Just like women journalists began to inject their *mestiz@* voices in the discursive arena, younger writers forcefully seized the periodical baton at precisely the moment that the general Mexican public, as consequence of the revolution, "despertaron el interés por las noticias y por la información actualizada y punctual…El trabajo del periodista adquirió una nueva función pública: éste se vio a sí mismo como un hombre de acción que salía a las calles a ser testigo de los hechos" (Serna 209).

Such revitalized energy instigated a process of *auto-comentario* and *auto-proyección* in the spheres of national rhetorical representation. Authenticity became a reoccurring theme and insatiable desire of Mexican newspaper writing and distribution, as did a massive shift upwards in terms of its professionalization.

Returning to the topic of the PR campaign of the 1970s-1990s, the placement of advertisements, etc. suggests that those individuals leading the positive Mexi-centric media efforts were perhaps ill informed about their U.S. audience and the actual depth of anti-Mexican sentiment, since they opted to focus on such a narrow segment of the population who themselves had many ulterior motives. A threat narrative is not constructed to sway the opinions and reactions of those constructing the rhetoric but rather those listening to it, wholly relying on the notion that the audience will either not be well-informed enough to decipher the misinformation or hyperbole or is simply disinterested enough to take the rhetoric at face value. By focusing their efforts entirely on a limited political and economic sector, the more important general U.S. public did not see the harmless, nearly wholesome, Mexico that the folks steering the PR campaign were attempting to propagandize (Johnson 18).

Compounding this misdirection was an additional bungle on behalf of Mexican public relations strategists at what would be a crucial time:

> Public relations efforts focused on making more money for the country and attracting investment, not on Mexico's overall image or extended relations with U.S. citizenry. Although there is evidence that the Mexican government approached the media directly…to complain about negative stereotypes, there are no FARA records of…attempts to decrease negative coverage about immigration and drugs (Johnson 19).

It would appear then that while a Latino (Mexican) threat narrative was aggressively circulated in the U.S. as a public relations and media scheme, it was met with a somewhat misplaced counter

narrative on behalf of Mexican media resulting in the latter's efforts being snuffed out by its louder, more aggressive, and more calculated counterpart.

In the 2000's, an intriguing "collision" emerged in this "vexed space" of clashing wholesome/blemished and white/brown narrative negotiations that was once limited to the border region yet, because of social media and rapid trans-border interconnectivity, is now prolific throughout both nations (Saldaña-Portillo 25). The U.S. response to such collisions has been an intensive "legal engineering" of preserving national space as belonging to white citizens while simultaneously strengthening not only the continuation but the proliferation of exclusionary space for the non-citizen non-white individual. The products of calculated exclusionary legislation and subsequent social practice are pointedly engineered to protect, maintain, and bolster a "white propertied class" who has high stakes "investment in their whiteness" (Saldaña-Portillo 26).

While this may not be new in U.S. or border region racial and cultural histories, motivations behind and components of the LTN in the U.S. are now being directly challenged by the large U.S.-based undocumented Latino community and alternative narratives in Mexico; indeed, they threaten an investment in demanding to maintain racialized space any longer. Increased and enduring spatial collision between the U.S. and Mexico is thus not merely "vexed" territorial and physical space, but vexed psychic spaces that become evident in the headline-specific textual selections examined below.

The careful review and subsequent selection of specific words or phrases published in the headlines of three specific Mexican newspapers, *El Norte*, *Reforma*, and *Mural*, between 2000-2015 were pursued in part due to Chavez's focus on the vocabulary and imagery used on the

previously discussed American Legion Magazine cover, and the absence of such attention to Mexican print media counterparts. While Chavez's discussion is paramount to the current socio-political situation of Mexican immigrants who are literally inside the borders of the United States, a crucial perspective is lacking in regard to the influence that calculated discursive formations crafted by Mexican print media sources have on Mexican nationals who reside in Mexico.

In the book, *Gringolandia: Mexican Identity and Perceptions of the United States*, Stephen Morris suggests that "[l]ittle is known about the nature of Mexicans' complex sentiments towards their northern neighbor (*sus primos del norte*), the role such images play in shaping national identity or public policy…or [how] political changes (democratization) contest past images or what might be emerging in their place" (2). Morris ponders internal Mexican cultural production to explore what traits are "stressed" or "downplayed" and attempts to identify what the perceived impact is that U.S. discursive formations have on Mexico as a nation or for the Mexican citizens living there (3).

Important to realize here is how U.S. imagery in Mexico is not "static" but "fluid", constantly being influenced and modified by external factors such as social media that permit a type of ebb and flow of public narrative construction and general perception (Morris 4-5, 26-28). Since much of this information and image sharing technology is bred from within the United States (the veritable progenitor of globalization), this same fluidity and pliability does *not* occur within the broad U.S. public forum; the imagery, what is stressed, and what is downplayed, in regards to Mexico and the Mexican people, is fixed and has been for decades, demonstrated in

part how identical certain elements of the LTN narrative remain indistinguishable, and even interchangeable, across three centuries (19th, 20th, and 21st).

The power of connotative messaging cannot be understated in either situation, *mexicano* or American, nor can the "contextuality of action" that it breeds, or the "common settings" and "mutual knowledge" likewise perpetuated by such deliberate communiqué dispatching, that are so necessary for a threat narrative to flourish (Chavez, "Latino Threat", 42; Giddens 99). If American newspaper headlines are steeped in verbiage that directly connect with broader socio-cultural narratives, infiltrated with uncritically accepted social and political credo (blind acceptance by the masses is indeed the imperium of a successful threat narrative), it is an apt assertion that they cannot, and should not, be dismissed as a random, superficial "phenomena" in Mexico either.[18]

II. Titulares mexicanos

Now to expand the examination of forums in which the LTN occurs, transplanting from magazine to newspaper, and from the United States to Mexico.[19] It is possible to extract the basic tenets of the LTN and apply them to newspaper headlines printed and distributed in the Mexican cities of Monterrey, Guadalajara, and Mexico City under the basis that an identical "contextuality of action", "common setting", and "mutual knowledge" are equally as present and influential for

[18] Chavez, borrowing from Michael Parenti, clarifies this further by stating that "[t]he Press does many things and serves many functions, but its major role, its irreducible responsibility is to continually recreate a *view of reality* supportive of existing social and economic *class power*" (Parenti 10, emphasis mine). The association with Press and responsibility is a curious one at this juncture since it could be argued that the perpetuation of a narrative such as the LTN in the United States causes social, political, and economic damage and marginalization with distinct nativist flair.

[19] Magazine covers were the original LTN source material examined by Chavez.

the Mexican national reader as a sampling from New York, Houston, and Los Angeles would be for the gringo-centric U.S. reader. Of course, regional idiosyncrasies exist in either scenario, but the purpose of selecting publications from three different regions is to demonstrate the pervasiveness with which a uniform threat narrative diffuses on a national scale. Additionally, the Mexican newspaper reader is, presumably, hailing from the same social or national pool as the Mexican national magazine reader, thus employing (or perhaps succumbing to) the same cultural assumptions and identity markers due to the possession of, and influence by, a Mexi-centric forum. Indeed, it would not be logical for a radical divergence in messaging to occur in this case from one print media type to another (social and political stance aside; obviously a conservative publication would differ from its liberal counterpart, but conservative and liberal publications across media types would sing the same tune regardless of medium). In focusing this consideration on Mexican publications rather than U.S., a current void in contemporary consideration of the "illegal problem" will be filled, and a perspective that is muzzled (at least insofar as the U.S. audience is aware) will be admitted into the discursive arena.

Chavez established several catch phrases and trigger words that are employed as a type of urgent "call to arms" to heighten the threat that Latino (specifically Mexican) immigrants supposedly pose to the safety and stability of the United States. These include the following: repetition of *illegal alien* and *problem* in the same sentence, *crisis*, *out of control*, *invasion*, *troubled neighbors*, *danger* (on the border and in American border communities), *curse* (as related to proximity and population), and the *warning* of the U.S. becoming a "Hispanic nation" or a veritable "Améxica", (Chavez, "Latino Threat", 30-42). The frequency with which these

terms appear in U.S. print media is indeed astonishing,[20] particularly when considered along with the often hyperbolic, and even completely erroneous, article content. I examined Headlines between 2000-2015 from *El Norte* (Monterrey), *Mural* (Guadalajara), and *Reforma* (Mexico City) newspapers to investigate whether the same catch phrase and trigger word phenomena was occurring in Mexico, and whether the socio-political rhetoric objectives served a similar purpose, or had comparable social consequences, as the LTN in *el norte*.

In order to narrow search parameters and hone context specificity, I scrutinized the frequency and application of two terms in particular: *inmigración* and *frontera*.[21] Between this fifteen-year period, the term *inmigración* appeared 363 times while *frontera* appeared on 1,366 occasions with a total of 1,729 headline occurrences. Just as with the LTN, the incidence of term appearance ebbed and flowed according to national socio-political context, and is demonstrated in the following figures:

[20] Especially during election year cycles and annually around or on the Fourth of July Independence Day celebrations.

[21] To specify that the type of *inmigración* and the specific *frontera* of interest are the ones between the United States and Mexico, the terms *EEUU* and *Estados Unidos* were included as sub-parameters of search results.

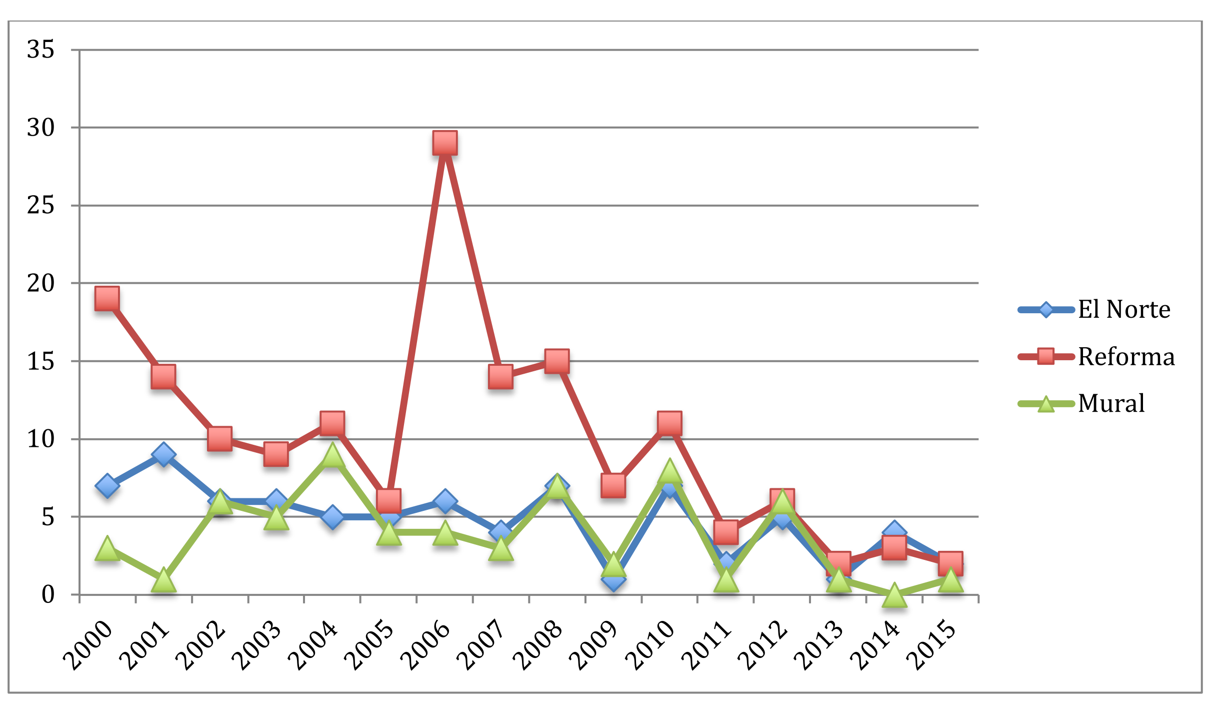

Fig. 7. Inmigración/Immigration.

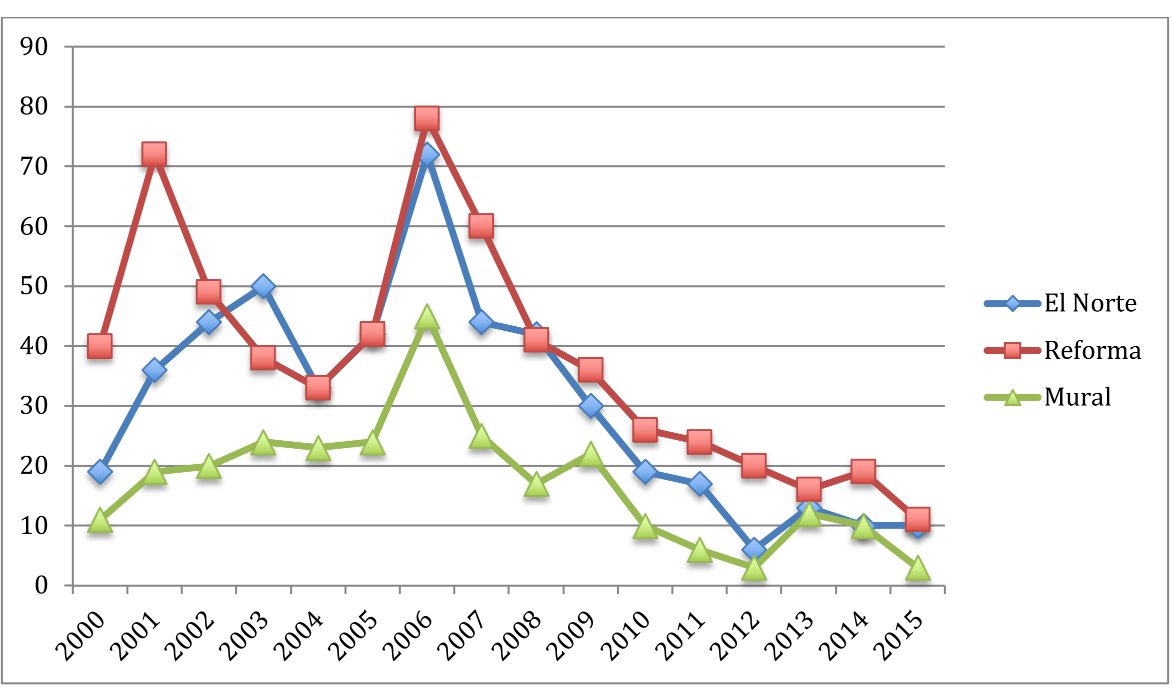

Fig. 8. Frontera/Border.

As is evident, *Reforma* consistently led with both terms in regard to headline usage frequency with 162 (*inmigracón*) and 605 (*frontera*), a logical outcome since *Reforma* is based in Mexico City. In the subsequent review of article content associated with each identified headline, I noticed a distinct shift in discursive tone when comparing the start of the millennium versus the end of its first quarter. Four distinct themes prominently emerged as I examined the verbiage employed in the headlines published between 2000-2015: patience and conformity, the heroization of border crossers, blurring *terrorismo* and *turismo,* and being fed up with a fantasy.

Patience and Conformity

At the start of the year 2000 (pre-September 11th), *flexibilizar* was not an uncommon partner with *inmigración* or *EEUU*,[22] suggesting a willingness to both bend and wait as the U.S. flirted with immigration reform that would benefit Mexico. These newspapers employed language that detailed the vast opportunity (employment and wealth) available in the U.S. accented with a demonstrable tendency to encourage migration north and to hypothesize about a budding Mexican prosperity. Around October, the tone changed; *resistir* was a constant companion with *U.S.* or *EEUU*, as were frequent calls to *presionar* and *exigir justicia* on account of raids that were taking place and the political dragging of feet that was forestalling reform efforts. This contributed to a deep sense of frustration that "aun no abran" either the border or the nation to their southern neighbor. The emphasis and recurrence of the word *aun* underscores a sense of disconcertment and certain astonishment that an opening of the U.S.-Mexican border to better enable Mexican nationals to cross with ease had still not yet come to fruition.

[22] Italicized words in the subsequent discussion represent terms taken directly from headlines reviewed.

Nearly one year later, in August 2001, one has the sense that yet again a carrot was being dangled in regard to the possibility of immigration reform with the frequent suggestion of *amnestia para ilegales*, a program to permit *obtención automática de ciudadanía*, and even the presence of an *esfuerzo para restructura la política de inmigración* in the form of political coalitions meeting in the U.S. There is a duality in the reporting of these prospects since the anticipation of genuine possibility is still permeated by a distinct feeling that the U.S. was hesitating and stalling. Still, it is curious to note that one month prior to the September 11th attacks there was much coverage that gave the appearance of considerable dialogue transpiring between the two nations (and more importantly, among American leaders themselves) regarding the potential for increased and improved Mexican access to and legal retention in the United States.

Heroization of Border Crossers

By 2001, the social effects that so much migration to the north was having on Mexican communities and familial/communal relationships were becoming more urgently acknowledged. Lucrecia Santibáñez published the Op-Ed "Inmigración" in *El Norte* on June 20, 2001 that perhaps best vocalized the feeling of discomfort with the phenomena. She blamed then President Vicente Fox for manipulating the position of migrants who were "huyendo al norte" and for using them as a tool for strategic political rhetoric, one that Fox supposed could be used to convince the U.S. that *los mexicanos* were helpful (arriving in spades with an eager disposition to aid in the betterment of the U.S. in both a literal structural sense by providing manual labor and in a cultural sense by offering enrichment). In a broad view, Santibáñez uses the implications made by Fox of the "eager" Mexican migrant to warp them into a sardonic personification with

the intent to make the point that such an impression of sweeping Mexican simpleminded alacrity is absurd (8).

As a rebuttal to Fox, Santibáñez encourages a more micro-level perspective that border-crossing migrants are *valiosos*, possessing a *fortaleza de carácter*, and to consider how much of a shame (a bona fide tragedy) it is that "miles de nuestros mejores gentes se vayan todos los días a trabajar en tierra ajena. Pero no se les puede culpar" (8). Indeed not, as the sentiment that it is the *culpa* of perfidious Mexican politicians (like Fox) for not working towards the betterment of Mexican social, cultural, and structural restoration to keep *mexicanos* in Mexico, becomes increasingly evident.

In response to widespread reporting that the U.S. was undertaking efforts in *el norte* to make not only prosperity, but basic survival a challenge, Mexican newspaper headlines were punctuated by a significant increase in reporting that emphasized the human element of illegal immigration and border crossing in 2005 (Cornelius 4, Humberto Toledo 4, López 7, Muñoz Bata 17). This was precisely the opposite of the dehumanizing reporting efforts (driven by the LTN) taking place at the same time in the U.S.

As was demonstrated by figures five and six above, 2006 was a pivotal year in terms of immigration and border related coverage in Mexico. This was also true in the United States, though despite such congruence, there is again a radical disparity in what was being reported between the two nations. Published on December 21, 2006, the article "Frontera Invisible: Lecciones navideñas para el Congreso de EU" by Muñoz Bara vehemently criticizes the occurrence of raids and abuses (identification theft, battery, etc.) reportedly taking place by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers. He decries the "trágica interrupción de la vida

familiar" (12) perpetuated by such ostensibly shameful intrusion and assault at the hands of the *gringo* law. Guided by verbiage such as "trágica", a reader with a stake in the situation (a child whose parents or relatives are in the U.S., a parent whose child has been sent north to live with immigrants, individuals who rely on remittance income, etc.) would develop sympathy towards the appalling and grievous manner in which "our" family members, peers, and national compatriots are being treated by "them" for seemingly no logical or objective reason, cultivating in turn a sense of needing to join together in solidarity.

Much of the contempt which underscores the article is coupled with the apt declaration that "los ilegales forman la columna vertebral de industrias como la agricultura, la industria de la construcción y la de restaurantes y hotels" (12). I identified multiple articles for 2006 that report statistics, evidence, and general information that have since been proven to be accurate (Bustamante 5, Marchand 8, Marella Delgado and Grossi 10, Muñoz Bata 2, Rivera Prieto 6). Quite the opposite is true in U.S. newspaper counterparts as many of the "myths" often relied on to convince U.S. nationals that Mexican immigrants are a threat to national security and economic stability are simply untrue (Chomsky, "How Immigration" and "Jobs", Golash-Boza, Ramos, "Latino Wave").

As it is the most often repeated myth, pausing for a moment to examine the falsehood that "Immigrants Take American Jobs" with its socio-political cousin that "Immigrants Compete with Low-Skilled Workers and Drive Down Wages" is worthwhile (Chomsky 3-29). As Chomsky and others (Chavez, Golash-Boza, Guitérrez, "Walls and Mirrors", Ramos "Latino Wave" and "Manifesto") note, deregulation and deindustrialization (two by-products of the Reagan era), coupled with the nature of jobs changing in the U.S. during the 80s and 90s, are much more

significant (and verifiable) reasons why job loss has been encountered among American citizens in the late 20th and early 21st centuries (3-10). Corroborated by data collected by the Pew Research Center, "no consistent pattern emerges to show that native-born workers suffered…from increased numbers of foreign-born workers" (Kochnar). In fact, it is much more accurate to state that illegal Latinos living and working in the U.S. are actually an economic asset, adding an estimated $10 billion to the American economy each year, $4.5 billion of which is in tax revenue (Ramos, "Manifesto" 41-44).

Yet, as Chavez has already noted, while such verifiability is often not sufficient to deter the effects that a LTN has on the masses, perhaps the rhetoric of esteemed media figures might be. Such was the premise of Stephen Colbert's (comedian and former host of *The Colbert Report*, a popular satirical nightly news show) involvement with the *Take Our Jobs* campaign sponsored by the United Farm Workers (UFW) in 2010. The campaign invited any American citizen or legal resident "who wish to replace them [migrant workers] in the field[s]", and who believed immigrant farm workers were taking away jobs, to fill out a job application and be connected to farm employers.

On July 8, 2010 when Arturo Rodriguez, then President of the UFW, appeared on *The Colbert Report* television show, only three people in the entire nation had signed on to participate (or rather, 0.0000019% of the 153 million eligible labor force in July of 2010), inspiring Colbert himself to join the promotion and spend a day on a migrant farm as a farm worker. Colbert's popularity cannot be overstated, nor can the role he has played in several past social and political

campaigns,[23] and while his involvement certainly drew attention to the cause, in the end only seven individuals in the entire United States followed through (Chomsky, "How Immigration" 125).

Returning to the theme at hand, Democratic President Barack Obama was a leader in whom Mexican immigrants had placed a tremendous amount of faith (Ramos, "Country for All"). While that sentiment had diminished by the 2012 election cycle, it had not entirely disappeared and was indeed possible to revitalize, particularly in the aftermath of SB 1070 and with the enormous boost in popularity that resulted from the executive action taken by Obama to enact the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) order in June of 2012.

Throughout 2012 and 2013, Mexican newspaper headlines and articles again cited immigrants and immigration *al norte* as being the absolute *columna vertebral* of the U.S., emphasizing the significant financial and social *contribuciones* that migrants make, and how there was still ample time to amend the many *intentos fallidos* towards the *mexicanos* and *México* as Obama was ushered into a second term in office. The delusion was yet again short-lived. Between late 2013-2015 terms such as *indiferencia, desigualdad,* and *hipocresía* had assumed center stage in Mexican headlines, as had extensive reporting on the phenomenon of migrant *criminalización*, the *separación* between mothers and children, and the purportedly widespread efforts to form *cazamigrante* and *cazailegales* movements.

Blurring Terrorismo and Turismo

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[23] Financially sponsoring the U.S. Olympic speed skating team in 2010 after the team lost a significant portion of funding, donating nearly a million dollars to the South Carolina public school system, and bequeathing the entire sum amassed as part of his mock-super PAC to charities, to name a few.

By March of 2002, a definitively derisive tone takes the center stage in headlines and commentary, particularly in regard to what were seen as grave errors committed on behalf of the U.S. as what was increasingly perceived as a reactionary response to the September 11th terrorist attacks, and the policy changes (especially with border entry) that resulted. There are multiple accusations that the U.S. was confusing "terrorismo con turismo" and had launched an out-and-out "campaña preventiva" against Mexican migrants and undocumented workers (Muñoz Bata 19).

Such accusations continue well into 2003 with noteworthy coverage on the increased pressure that U.S. businesses felt in regard to hiring undocumented workers and being at risk for immigration violations. This marked a distinct shift since traditionally many legal policies regarding undocumented workers were not enforced, or were blatantly ignored, since it was somewhat (clandestinely) universally acknowledged that undocumented migrant workers were vital to the sustainability and stability of certain U.S. business sectors such as agriculture, landscaping, construction, food service, and domestic work (Chomsky, "How Immigration", 113-151).

Furthermore, there was an increase in the observation that the September 11th attacks had caused a bona fide paradox in terms of immigration policy and "foreigner fear" between the United States and Mexico, a point that is particularly driven home by Sergio Muñoz Bata in his January 10, 2003 *El Norte* article: "El hecho de que todos los terroristas que participaron en el ataque fueron extranjeros residentes en el país ha determinado que las políticas migratorias U.S. hayan sido subordinadas a las políticas de seguridad nacional" (19).

2004 ushered in a focus on the mounting wave of racism against Mexican migrants living and working in the U.S. This is evident in a particular set of reportage mounted by *Mural* in December that homed in on specific hate-groups and their efforts to launch targeted programs to *detener* immigration, *deportar* undocumented individuals, and *quitarlos* as many public services as possible (public education, access to medical care, food and housing assistance, etc.) (Pacheco 6). It is interesting to note that the author of the article, "Piden actuar contra el racism", depicts these *grupos de odio* as a fringe movement. Yet, in U.S. media, such a stance of demanding steps to stop, deport, and restrict was (and is) exceedingly common, not on the fringe at all. It could be argued then that the cry to take these steps was much louder and widespread in the U.S. than the *Mural* article suggests, echoing a similar PR miscalculation with that which was previously discussed.

Together with these hate-groups, the thought that a social *frontera invisible* had become insurmountable had gained traction in headlines and commentary. This was partly due to Republican President George Bush being re-elected, a leader who Mexican nationals had become entirely disenchanted with due to his complete about-face in regard to immigration reform between 2000-2004 (Ramos, "Latino Wave"). His re-election, and the invisible social and political borders for Mexican immigrants that were becoming solidified in the United States, were often termed as being *miope*, blatantly *discriminatoria*, extremely *mal intencionada*, and even *suicida*.

Political commentary was not exclusive to President Bush or the U.S. political scene. Reporting on Mexican President Vicente Fox depicted him as a complete subordinate to Washington and downright dysfunctional in how he and his associates were operating. This point

is emphasized by Luis Enrique Pachecho in his November 22, 2004 article, “Lamentan ausencia de política integral”: “La política de Fox ha tomado en cuenta a los migrantes…pero desafortunademente con una idea central: que sigan mandando dinero” (16).

January 2010 headlines and coverage marked a return towards reporting on the potential to revitalize *el sueño migratorio* and a sense of an *esperanza recargada*. Such sentiments were short-lived; by July much of the dialogue about immigration in both nations was engrossed by the passing and implementation of The Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act in Arizona, more commonly recognized as SB 1070. Among its provisions included permission for law enforcement officers to determine immigration status by appearance, and to impose severe penalties on individuals who sheltered, hired, or transported “unregistered aliens” (Chomsky, “How Immigration” 152-180, Fiore, Vargas). It was widely denounced as being among the strictest and flagrantly racist anti-immigration measures passed in recent federal legal memory. While the Supreme Court struck down three provisions of the Act on the grounds that they were unconstitutional, one was sustained: the granting of permission to law enforcement officers to check immigration status if an individual were to be lawfully stopped with credible reason.

The signing of the law on April 23, 2010 ignited a firestorm. Among articles published in *El Norte* and *Mural* during June, July, and August of 2010, there was frequent discussion concerning similar laws being passed in other states. Many went so far as to offer comprehensive lists of locales that had enacted similar policies, presumably so that those migrating could avoid them (Díaz Briseño 15, Cázares, Corpus, and Ramírez 3, García 7). With an overtone of “at last”, in the July 15, 2010 article, “Obama y la inmigración” Gabriela de la Paz observed how efforts to

enact SB 1070 would "obligará a que muchos candidatos a cargos de elección se declaren abiertamente a favor o en contra de una reforma migratoria" (9), anticipatory of a publicly definitive posturing that many, if not all, U.S. politicians had been previously unwilling to do. But, as she notes, such an "obligation" contains a trap not so much for politicians, but for Mexican immigrants who might seek to benefit from the outcry against the anti-illegal immigration law:

> [T]odo discurso en torno a la inmigración, legal o ilegal, está inmerso en una narrativa del inmigrante ideal, cuya imagen es aquél que llegó en barco hace décadas, a principios del siglo 20 o después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Es decir, *no el que cruza la frontera por tierra*, con lo que claramente se trata de europeos (9, emphasis mine).

Fed up with the Fantasy

2006 solidified the belief that the border zone, and any potential for immigration reform that would facilitate improved relations between the two nations, had become "Un muro de mentiras" (Vargas Llosa 2). There was a palpable sense of bewilderment and befuddlement, a veritable "representación teatral" on behalf of U.S. politicians that had led only to a "muro de fantasia", one that was entirely "imaginario" (Vargas Llosa 2). Vargas Llosa offers the statistic that between 2005-2006 "hispánicos" had sent a staggering sum of 45 million dollars in remittance money, or 60% more than in 2003, to their families. Vargas Llosa makes the astute observation that such a figure would be easy to manipulate as a negative (and indeed was by U.S. media), but the opposite is true:

> [L]os prejuicios deducen que los inmigrantes están causando una hemorragia terrible del patrimonio norteamericano. Pero la *verdadera lectura* de esa cifra debe ser, más bien de admiración y de entusiasmo pues ella quiere decir que los inmigrantes de origen latinoamericano han producido el ultimo año, *para los Estados Unidos*, una riqueza *cuatro o cinco veces mayor* que se ha quedado allí y servido para incrementar la renta nacional (2, emphasis mine).

This is further corroborated in an article by Margarita Vega in which she explains how "[p]or cada dólar de remesa enviada a México, los paisanos dejan 25 más en Estados Unidos" and that "[l]os migrantes mexicanos aportan a la economía U.S. más de 615 mil millones de dólares al año frente a los 24 mil millones de dólares que envían como remasas" (4). This information was simply not being shared with the U.S. public on a large scale, and definitely not in a manner that was emphatic enough to counter the LTN. Vargas Llosa and Vega suggest a sense of incredulity that such a wealthy, limitless, and eminent nation as the U.S. could not only be so unwilling to "share" with precisely those individuals who contribute to its colossal affluence, but engage in an aggressive offense to eradicate their presence, an extermination that would ultimately prove extremely economically detrimental.

2007 ushered in louder calls to *denunciar* the U.S. and its polemic immigration practices, and to continue the unifying efforts to oppose and adopt a posture of zero tolerance. By the summer of 2008, immigration reform and overall relations between Mexico and the United States were often categorized as a *tema pendiente*, again emphasizing the notion that they are "still" not important enough to be front and center in the form of unilateral action (even during a U.S. election year and despite mounting humanitarian pressure). In a curious turn of events, Mexico

announced in 2008 new measures to create jobs to attract foreigners to Mexico and make entry and residence in the country easier (Barajas 4). It is significant to note that the job sectors specifically seeking an influx of immigrant labor were taxi drivers, gardeners, and agriculture, or rather precisely the types of jobs Mexican immigrants were obtaining, and employment sectors that they were bolstering, in the United States (Barajas 4, Chomsky, "How Immigration", 113-151).

III. Conclusions

A regularity with which certain terms and phrases appear in Mexican headlines and reporting 2000-2015 does occur, and appears to achieve a socio-political response in much of the same ways the LTN effected discursive tones and directions in the U.S. Terms that appeared across all three periodicals with noted frequency in regards to *inmigración* to the U.S. include the following: *flexibilizar, aun, resistir, dudar, mentira, oposición, presionar, justicia, injusticia, discriminación, rostro humano, crisis, infrahumano, integral, columna vertebral, revivir, fracasa, contradictorio, frenar, antiinmigrante,* and *cazainmigrante*. In regard to the U.S.-Mexican *frontera*, frequently appearing terms consisted of: *militizar, justicia, frenar, advertir, perder, pesadilla, reclamar, demandar, cooperación, reforzar, insistir, demandar, consecuencias, justificar, criticar, aislar,* and *cazailegales*.

"Titulares" published in Mexican periodicals between 2000-2015 served to defend Mexican interests, expose and challenge U.S. chicanery, yet also to establish a set of different priorities for the Mexico of the millennium, namely to bolster a *mexicanidad* that was not deferential to its northern neighbor. New agendas and a recasting of internal and external gazes

emerge as profoundly evident in millennial literature produced during this same period of time, the topic of which will be explored in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

Literary Voices of the Millennial *Mexican@*

Fig. 9. Cartoon by Angel Boligan.

This chapter shifts focus from headlines as a textual medium to twenty-first century literary examples from two Mexican authors, Juan Villoro and Luis Alberto Urrea, to examine what Arturo Aldamo terms the "aesthetic politics of hybrid mestizo/a cultural production" (42). A career journalist as well as novelist, Villoro, a native of Mexico City, was selected for the simultaneously acerbic yet vigilant Mexi-centric perspective that saturates his short story collection *Los culpables*. The work of poet, essayist, and novelist Urrea, who was born in Ciudad Juarez and later moved to the U.S., speaks from an angle that smacks of the U.S.-*mexicano* duality that is a staple of the border region as a result of cross-border activity and settlement.

Literature is the most traditional way of accessing culture for scholars. I selected it as a second textual medium to explore external dichotomies between "lo mexicano" and their northern U.S. counterparts in the millennium due to the intimacy that longer prose affords. Internal dichotomies within Mexico also emerge as fundamental to the examination of these authors' work against the backdrop of millennial, twenty-first century, Mexico-based interpretations and perceptions of "lo mexicano". Sexuality, machismo, and femininity/feminism are three themes in particular that Villoro and Urrea re-negotiate through the situations in which their characters find themselves and the subsequent development that ensues. Both authors continue the tradition of challenging patriarchal archetypes that long dominated as national symbols within Mexican (and Mexican American) cultural narratives (La Malinche, La Llorona, La Virgen Guadalupe, el macho, U.S.-Mexican tensions, border politics, etc.). Yet, both also advance the narratives of contestation and reinvention with characters whose unavoidable trans-nationality induces (and in some cases, forces) a re-emergence of one's self as a more fully realized and confident representative of an archetype turned on its head.

Physical boundaries of the U.S.-Mexican border zone become analogous to internal cultural boundaries that are equally as divisive. Both writers challenge notions of the north/south divide from inside Mexico (southern Mexico versus northern) as a device to contest cultural borders of gender, class, and race by positioning female characters as influencers and heroines who seize sexual and political agency without succumbing to the classic standard of devolving into a duped victim. Physical and intellectual space is available in a short story and novel to develop characters and settings that might enable both author and reader to address broader issues broached by newspaper headlines. Additionally, Mexican literature has a long tradition of serving

as a device to aid the contestation of those plaguing identity dualities touched on in Chapter One: *chingón* and *chingada*, neighbor and foe, indigenous and Anglo/European, modern yet antiquated. Villoro and Urrea follow the tradition of leveraging the literary sphere to literally write into existence new interpretations of long held patriarchal, sexual, and national archetypes. In doing so, they follow the tradition of many female, indigenous, or other marginalized writers who preceded them. Writing into existence grants each writer's cast of characters the position of citizen with an active voice that will be consumed, and in turn reverberate.

I have closely examined the critical writings of María Inés Lagos, Jean Wyatt, Tim Hodgdon, Mary-Lee Mulholland, Rosa Linda Fregoso, and Nicolás Kanellos, along with comparative considerations of such notable authors as Isabelle Allende, Sandra Cisneros, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Valerie Luiselli, to better visualize how Villoro and Urrea's characters address the themes of sexuality, machismo, and femininity/feminism in a millennial Mexican and U.S.-Mexican border context. While I touch on each theme throughout this chapter, it is pertinent to briefly address the origins of the uniquely Mexican brand of feminism that coalesced in the mid-1970s, and how it has contributed to the context within which Villoro and Urrea situate their female characters in 2007 and 2009 respectively. While Villoro and Urrea are men, they fit into the existing body of literature by women, particularly the women listed above who are canonical authors that have been talking about versions of the topics of interest for this chapter since the 1970s.

While feminist-minded issues had been simmering prior to the 1975 World Conference on the International Women's Year (hosted in Mexico City),[24] it was this particular event that

[24] The *Mujeres en Acción Solidaria* held their first public demonstration in 1971 (Hodgdon 83).

brought women's issues to the mainstream forefront within Mexican discursive spheres in an intersectional and unfettered manner that had not previously occurred (Hodgdon 82). It was at this time that female leaders of the Mexican feminist movement "undertook not to join the American movement, but to *reinvent* a movement…taking into account the specific realities of [their] own country" (Hodgdon 83). One can assume that such realities would have included addressing complexes resultant of having had to live with the cultural memories and presence of La Malinche, *marianismo*, and other such sexualized and gendered dichotomies. Hodgdon importantly points out that while *femenistas mexicanas* certainly "borrowed cross-culturally", they did so in a consciously active and selective manner to coalesce a community of *mexicana*-brand "feminist sexual [and domestic] politics" (84).

I. Mariachi

Villoro's first short story "Mariachi" in the compilation *Los culpables* offers an interface with a sardonic set of characters that portray three distinct socio-political commentaries: Catalina, representative of the U.S., Julián, of Mexico from the perspective of those who have not left, and Brenda, Mexico from the perspective of those who left but have since returned. While each character speaks to these migratory allusions, Villoro also charges them with toppling sexual and gendered archetypes by shifting their gaze and experience. He does so by placing each in a set of circumstances that requires introspection resultant of some type of situational discomfort or providing a forum in which a different character's more "enlightened" perspective is shared. This subsequently influences the narrative direction towards a new route that breaks from previously fossilized prescriptions of female and male character development. In this way, particularly the

female characters embrace a behavioral mold that is much more aligned with millennial *Chicana/Mexicana* feminism.

"Mariachi" embarks on a derisive narrative from the start. The reader is immediately introduced to the main character, Julián, as "the only mariachi star who has never in his life mounted a horse" (6), a mariachi who possesses "the face like an abandoned ranchero, and the eyes of a brave man who knows how to cry" (9) and whose "worst album…had gone platinum" (12), but owes his fame to the lone, seemingly contemptible, fact of being "from here" (Mexico) (9), an identity marker that he struggles with. Equally as explicit is the character Catalina (Cata), a caricature of a pompous and materialistic woman with an overly ambitious opinion of her appearance and allure. As Julián explains, "According to her, she could have been many things (almost all of them terrifying) because of her body" (9). Cata and Julián's relationship is one driven by boredom (on behalf of Julián), opportunism (on behalf of Brenda), and sex (both). Neither fulfills the other in any meaningful capacity, giving their interactions a palpable tinge of friction and animosity.

Cata personifies exaggerated negative female stereotypes on both sides of the border in that she leverages her physical figure as a tool to manipulate her way into deals and prospects otherwise closed off to others, accessing seemingly limitless opportunities. She fully illustrates a common tactic for male Latin America-born or based authors to choose female characters "to personify the eroticism, immorality, greed, and materialism they perceive in American society" (Kanellos 9). Typically, this female is a white American citizen, but for Cata, who is not, she still demonstrates all of the above traits in spades, only further substantiating an allegoric purpose of representing the cultural schizophrenia resultant of a place like contemporary U.S.-Mexican

border zones where "two cultural systems meet and conflict" (Wyatt 246). Such characters are often on the receiving end of harsh criticisms for "adopting" questionable mannerisms and behaviors in the shadow of "loose" and "liberal" American women as imitation in this case represents the worst moral and social decision a Latina could make (Kanellos 9).

Perhaps such condemnation is a learned cultural response with roots engrained in the Malinche complex that accuses "loose" women of embodying the worst traits of their sex, the very traits that led to the conquest of Mexico and murder of millions. Sexual expression and complicity such as that which Cata embraces firmly position her as an undesirable deviant according to the Malinche interpretive model, a threat to national interests on a subconscious level, a level of erotic output too far down the spectrum and too close to the memory of having been *el chingón*/*la chingada* to ultimately be desirable or acceptable. Indeed, Julián often seems irritated by Cata and has little good to comment on throughout the story in regard to her character, which serves to assist the reader in concluding that she is no more than an opportunistic nuisance.

Chavez, Wyatt, Inés Lagos, and Aldama expound on the point of female representation in Latino literature by explaining how Latinas are often niched into representing only a limited handful of reductive stereotypes, the most relevant here being the "hot" hypersexualized Latina and the pure and virginal or married and obedient. One of the many issues with such a gendered oversimplification is how the confines of these rigid societal definitions of what/who a female is "able" to do/be consistently places the Latina in constant contrast to the "'modern' white U.S. wom[a]n" (Chavez, "Latino Threat", 77). Literature produced by Latinas has proved vital to a self and national contestation of these stilted stereotypes, particularly in the U.S.-Mexican border

region (though also too in broader Mexico) of the millennium.[25] It is precisely because of their literary contributions, which carve out their own space and write themselves into (new) existence, that the rigidity and limitations of these characterizations for the modern *mexicana* are able to be viewed as problematic.

Villoro leverages the groundwork laid by contemporary female writers in crafting Cata and Brenda's personalities. It is because of their female gaze (and it having a place at the table) that these female characters can be sexual and in control, domestic and professional, mother and individual, woman and political, etc. Cata is perhaps an extreme as she illustrates the "hot seductress" Latina type, and on the other hand also illustrates negative stereotypes of the modern, white, gringa. Confoundingly, this dual Latina/gringa type is simultaneously entrancing and unappealing to Julián whose melancholy and depression seem only perpetuated when he engages in discourse or relations with Cata. This suggests that in spite of progressive developments being crafted by women, reductive typecasts remain firmly entrenched in cultural negotiation. Just like the draw of flashy, materialistic, and opportunity-riddled America, the outsider (man in the story, immigrant in the real world) would be dazzled into succumbing even if actual substance was lacking.[26]

This personification further comes to life when Julián states that, "she [Cata] believes the only thing I could have been is a mariachi" (9). As a mariachi, Julián is a hyper-culturalized symbol, one that is limited to one stereotypical role with no assets to leverage to mobilize in

[25] Such as Gabby Rivera, Zoraida Cordova, Celia C. Peréz, Sara Uribe, Erika L. Sánchez, Rosie Molinay, and Valeria Luiselli.
[26] In the case of Cata, such substance would be in the form of personality, ethics, and intelligence while in the case of the U.S.A. this could be in the form of jobs, community, and legal socio-political mobility.

either his immediate world or beyond. This generates a palpable resentment that becomes further solidified for the reader when he responds to the question, "Are you Mexican?" with the declaration, "Yes, *but next time I won't be*" (9, emphasis mine). He admits that to say such a thing out loud would destroy him (professionally), as if the greater national collective could not endure such a denunciatory proclamation and candid perspective from "one of their own".

It is useful to consider how the mariachi has endured as a leading national symbol in Mexican cultural production since at least the nineteenth century.[27] It was during the strife-filled and disorderly nineteenth century that *rurales*, skilled horsemen recruited to serve as law enforcement, began to dress as *charros* (the garb visually associated with the mariachi). Later, during the Porfirato, this image was bolstered to one that represented "invincible national heroes" and permanently ingratiated into a collective psyche with notions of "manhood, [virility], nationhood, and power" (Nájera-Ramírez 4). As the twentieth century began and the revolution gained speed, politicians exploited the *charro* image while writers romanticized it, creating a perfect convergence within cultural production and consumption for the *charro* (mariachi) to illustrate exactly "the kind of imagined community that [was] the nation" (Nájera-Ramírez 4).[28] Such visual and rhetorical propagandizing reached new heights in the years after the revolution as the *charro* became a staple of efforts to foster "a sense of national unity and domestic ideals" and generally all that was pridefully embraced as uniquely "lo mexicano" (Nájera-Ramírez 5).

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[27] See Nájera-Ramírez for a historical timeline synopsis about the evolution of mariachi in Mexico.

[28] It also popularized Mexican nationalist cultural tokens and products, encouraging their consumption and popularity over European/Anglo/Western ones.

It is thus understandable that Julián might experience psychological distress as a result of his profession, and why he might consider the role an overwhelming burden. Stephen Morris interprets the formation of Julián's resentments by explaining how the tradition of marketing "implicit comparisons that operate to define Mexican 'failures' by [making constant] reference to U.S. 'successes'" encourages two reactions: first, that Mexico does not have the same caliber or quantity of success (highlighting a certain "second-rate" trait), and second, sparks internalization as to why the U.S. "should be so blessed (and, by extrapolation, Mexico not)" (113-114). So, to admit that he would prefer a different nationality would be to lend credence to what Morris makes the case to be an engrained Mexican inferiority complex reminiscent of the *hijo de la chingada* paradox discussed in Chapter One (to exist as both mother-Malinche and father-*chingón*).

The dynamic between Cata and Julián is one tinged with narcissism (Cata) and irksomeness (Julián). He wants her to be something that she is not (an older, white-haired woman) just as much as he wants to escape from something that he cannot (the hypocrisy of deceptively existing as a national and cultural symbol). While he may not go so far as proclaiming out loud that he would not opt to be Mexican or a national icon if given the choice, he physically rejects the burden to exist as a mariachi when he uses a riding crop on stage to "whack away the flowers they [the adoring fans] throw" (11), an action that the fans interpret as heightening the "macho" mariachi role yet in actuality is a desperate attempt to beat down, or hold at bay, the idolization that has become so repulsive for Julián to endure. Such physical rejection is again evident when he dreams of "driving a Ferrari, running over sombreros until they were nice and flat" and of "float[ing] in the stratosphere, look[ing] down at Earth and

see[ing] a blue bubble without a single sombrero" (12). The latter contemplation is particularly curious. Is Julián suggesting that he simply would like mariachis to disappear (along with his obligation to be one), or that the entirety of Mexico ceasing to exist would be a cause of the tranquility that seems to elude him?

While Cata assists in perpetuating the seemingly dreadful obligatory role of being a mariachi, Brenda appears to represent the personal or professional ideal that Julián cannot initially obtain (in a woman, white haired) or achieve (in his career, obscurity) for having successfully escaped by moving to Spain, even going so far as "defin[ing] herself as a fugitive from mariachis" (12). She has left the confines of a Mexico she "hated" behind,[29] yet paradoxically becomes involved with Julián despite his stature as the preminent mariachi. First, she perceives him as merely a product to manipulate though later she comes to see him as a person she must help to realize his true self. If Julián, being as firmly rooted into Mexican symbology as he is, serves as a representative marker for a changing Mexico, then it would not be too far of a leap to suggest that Brenda fulfills a second common Latino literary trope: females as the sole possessors of a unique responsibility to safeguard and perpetuate Hispanic (in this case Mexican) customs, values, and language (Kanellos 9).

Within the late twentieth and early twenty-first century iterations of mariachi, it is intriguing to note how *mariachera*, all female mariachi groups, have emerged (and in some cases, exceeded their male counterparts in popularity and marketability). Mary-Lee Mulholland is one of the few scholars currently researching questions of femininity as related to

[29] The reasons why Brenda so vehemently left Guadalajara are not revealed to the reader by her or Julián who explains that he "promised not to tell anyone. I can only say that she lived to escape that story" (20).

mariachi/mariachera in Mexico. She makes compelling points as to how and why *mariacheras* are re-fashioning the "unequal power relations" of old in Mexico as pertinent to notions of race, gender, and nationhood (359). Power relations are of particular interest to hone in on here since Villoro has indeed inverted the relationship power dynamic between Julián and Brenda. Julián is the more emotional, moody, unstable, and unpredictable one despite being a man while Brenda is the self-assured constant. This role reversal breaks from gendered societal expectations, particularly in how Brenda is able to counsel Julián to take direct action (action that arguably could emasculate him in the public's - - the nation's - - eyes). In this way, Brenda's character embodies how she "slip[s] into the in-between spaces of normative identity constructs, sometimes overtly, but most often subtly, to challenge and undermine…categories of gender and sexuality" (Mulholland 360).

Brenda seems to be the only character who Julián is able to expressly tell that he does not want to be a mariachi, an admission that is not met with the dismissiveness that would be expected from Cata, or a look the other way response from fans, but rather with the personal and probing response of "What do you want?", "What do you want *to be*?", and "What do you want *now*?" (15). This suggests that she, the "mariachi fugitive", understands Julián in a way that other characters cannot or will not. It is interesting to note here in regard to the intimacy that develops between Julián and Brenda by virtue of their professional partnership that with each narrative appearance she breaks the mold of docility and submissiveness suggested by the above theory that a (Mexican) woman's role is to exclusively protect and produce the nation. Precisely because she is inquisitive, persuasive, and worldly, Brenda is able to mingle with Julián on a relationship plane that no other Mexican female character is able to. As a result, Julián does realize his

cultural potential as a symbol of Mexico, which in turn preserves his public persona as a mariachi "deity", maintains a general sense of communal contentedness with his "role", and thus ultimately upholds the nation, just as a woman's role is to do. This process parallels the way in which women push Mexico towards realizing its own potential. While it might seem that Julián is the main character of the short story, it is actually Brenda. She decenters the masculine, leading the reader to conclude that what initially appears to be a male-centered story is not.

Through Brenda, Villoro has created a female heroine with a persona of autonomy and boldness who appears to have broken the socio-literary gendered mold. She hated Mexico, suffered in Mexico, and absconded from Mexico, yet, in the end she is precisely the individual who is exclusively able to rescue Julián (the nation) from teetering too far into ridiculousness and parody, an extreme that would conceivably be too much for the public to tolerate resulting in a socio-cultural self-combustion that cannot be permitted to occur. She is neither *Malinche* nor *María,* successfully shaking off their historical hold by negotiating different signifying systems and still able to perceive situations and surroundings between multiple cultural paradigms (Mexican, European, indigenous, Anglo, masculine, feminine, sexual, independent) (Wyatt 245). Additionally, Brenda is the only character who uses Julián's name; it is not until she speaks it that the reader becomes acquainted with him in this more personalized way, even though the story is narrated by him in first person, as though she and she alone is charged with re-introducing him.

The necessity of such a re-introduction warrants closer examination. Julián is presented with the opportunity to participate in a film that will afford the prospect of becoming "the first mariachi without complexes, a symbol of the new Mexican" (11). Cinematic representations of the virile male mariachi became such a staple of early twentieth century films that a niche film

genre called *charro* emerged. These films massively upped the ante of linking the mariachi image to public conceptions of patriotism. Indeed, "commercial [charro] films proved to be the most powerful and influential channel for popularizing the *charro* as a national symbol across class, gender, and even political boundaries" (Nájera-Ramírez 7). By 1936, *comedia ranchera* was the defining cultural propaganda tool leveraged to define who/what a "true Mexican" was (defenders of the nation and family who happened to also sing, dance, and participate in festivals) (Nájera-Ramírez 7). By 1940, an overt political motive assumed control of these films, ensuring that the ideological content of Mexican movies paralleled sentiments of the current administration (Nájera-Ramírez 8). For the *charro* films, this meant a much stronger association with true "mexicanidad" being "fuerte, feo y formal" yet now also being popularized to emphasize specific political and cultural views of society and its norms, it is this burdened image that haunts Julián for the reasons best explained by Nájera-Ramírez:

> As a national hero, then, the *charro* [mariachi] became much more complex because, while the…traits served to humanize [and further "Mexicanize"] the *charro*, they also offset his violent and abusive behavior. In other words, because the *charro* possessed redeeming humanistic qualities, and because his ends justified his means, the *charro* was forgiven all his faults…In this way the negative qualities became palatable, acceptable, and for some, perhaps, even valued (9).

It is with this gaze in mind that when viewing Julián one can see Villoro's millenniality emerge. Julián can no longer stomach being on the receiving end of an adulation of which he does not feel worthy. Such public projection of blind acceptance becomes nearly toxic to him,

paralyzing and infuriating, perhaps a literary manifestation of the millennial rejection of old guard societal rules. If before, the *charro's* popularity was able to achieve such mainstream idolatry because it "appealed to an earlier, idealized, romanticized social structure where everyone knew their place, where certain privileged men ruled", the millennial take via Julián's existential struggle is that being relegated to a societal place based on predetermined class, gender, etc. is no longer acceptable to the masses. It is a rejection, a shedding of a skin. It is curious that there would be a need for a new-and-improved mariachi public figure, and even more so when one considers how presenting this "upgraded model" would be one that no longer carries the burdens of traditional expectations of masculinity. Which complexes might the Mexican public be in need of purging? Could this be an underhanded admission that deep inferiority is one? Is there potential for the public in the story to be attracted to such a regenerated representative of non-fictitious Mexicans?

Villoro leaves little to the imagination of what such an improved symbol and person might consist of: Julián the re-introduced mariachi has a prosthetic penis. The examination of overt and obscure phallic literary inclusions is well established across multiple disciplines; suffice to mention that phalli have long been accepted to represent virility and masculinity, often in hyper-exaggerated contexts. In the case of Julián, the prosthetic phallus is, to him, a "shamelessly raunchy" visage while, to everyone else, invokes adoration, albeit "in a very strange way" (16-17). Indeed, as a result Julián becomes "the stallion of the fatherland" (a new, unanticipated public reaction) when in reality he "couldn't take [his] pants off without feeling diminished" (an older, and predictable, gender enforced effect) (18).

That the virile visual of the mariachi is one so deeply engrained in Mexican cultural psyche is precisely what makes it so useful for a millennial voice such as Villoro to leverage in order to broach issues of sexual politics and national identity. A mariachi character would tap into a mental place of both recognition and comfortable disregard (no aspect of the image is a threat). It is thus an extremely useful literary figure to be employed as an incognito agent to slip by readers, lull them with they might initially perceive to be as a safe and predictable character, only to be too far into the narrative by the time this "new" mariachi reveals his true colors. It is precisely the notoriety and celebrity of "the mariachi" token image that makes the stereotype so useful a tool to pry open an old narrative and destabilize it.[30]

While it may be demoralizing for Julián to exist as the most prominent and recognizable symbol connected to national heritage (the mariachi), the burden of actualizing the "new" Mexican actually propels him to self-realization. As Brenda proclaims, "I had forgotten what a penis can do in Mexico" (21); thus, leading to her proposal to remedy the situation by creating another film and providing Julián with an opportunity to rid himself of his prosthetic fallacy (both in phallic terms and otherwise). He would do so by again posing in an intimate manner, putting himself on display, but with the critical difference of not using a prosthetic enhancement, but rather presenting the Mexican audience with a "stark, authentic" version of their "mariachi stallion" (21). Doing so would obviously be in direct conflict with the new mariachi model dispossessed of complexes discussed above.

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[30] There is a parallel to be drawn here between the mariachi image and that of the *narco* badboy and/or bandit persona discussed in Chapter Three. In both instances, a tried-and-true visual is co-opted to serve an ulterior motive and to challenge past meanings of representations.

The three principal characters appear to personify three socio-cultural commentaries that re-negotiate and destabilize traditional narratives about sexuality, machismo, and femininity/feminism within Mexican cultural production. In naming the second film *Guadalajara* after the place Brenda hated and fled, coupled with Julián's stripping away of all illusion (cinematic and otherwise), both succeeded in embracing the elements that perpetuated such personal disquietude for each. Still, one wonders if Julián's behavior towards both female characters (Cata and Brenda) is allegory for a want on behalf of Villoro. Julián wants Cata to be something she is not able to be; does he want Mexico to be something that *la patria* is unable to be either? Or perhaps to return to a way that "she" has moved away from due to hypersexual, materiality-centric American influence? It is perceivable that the contrast in demeanor between Cata and Brenda suggests that Villoro desires Mexico to abandon her "Cata ways" and embrace the domestic and international potential of being a "Brenda", a *patria* aware of her globalized influence and fully able to operate within it, yet still more than capable of not buckling under its ubiquity.

II. Amigos Mexicanos

Such a desire to not yield is more closely examined in Villoro's second short story of interest from the *Los culpables* compilation, "Amigos Mexicanos". It is brimming with examples of a contrasted twenty-first century Mexican persona with that of the gringo, embodied by Samuel Katzenberg. Immediately, the reader learns that Katzenberg has come to Mexico "to do a story on violence" (89), relayed in a manner that is suggestive of an exasperation on behalf of the narrator towards a near exclusive interest in writing about and reporting on Mexico's drugs, bloodshed, and conflict.

Regardless of the realities of violence in Mexico,[31] Katzenberg embodies the archetype gringo outsider who harps with a perverse obsession on abstract notions of Mexican crime. For him, as well as (Jack) Kerouac and (Allen) Ginsberg, who the narrator groups into this cohort of individuals who were "big-time addict[ed]" to Mexico as they perceived it but "scared [they'd] get jumped" (97), the country, its people, their habits, and the culture, are built up in their imaginations to be titillating, yet, nevertheless, overly unrestrained for their comfort. It becomes increasingly difficult for the narrator to work within the illusory parameters of Katzenberg's Mexico, evident when he comments that identifying new, attractive, violent settings would no longer be easy since "all the spots [he'd] been mugged are too ordinary" (98). This becomes an obvious point of contention for the narrator: "I silently cursed Katzenberg, incapable of appreciating the richness of Mexican kitsch. He only paid to see violence" (101), a lawlessness that in many cases was exaggerated, staged, and derisive.

The narrator's exasperation is tinged with mockery from the outset. He comments on Katzenberg's indefatigable tendency to sprinkle his conversations with the Spanish words he knows, such as when he describes his new position at Point Blank magazine as a *quemarropa* (89) and his new boss as a "very cool *mujer*, a one-woman *fiesta*" (90). Katzenberg further commits the crime of establishing himself as an "über-*gringo*" by embodying several

[31] Villoro does include hints commenting on what effect the pervasive violence rampant in the twenty-first century has had on collective Mexican psyche when the narrator speaks to the police after Katzenberg's "kidnapping": "I sat in the patrol car…From the passenger's seat, Martín Palencia informed his partner: 'El Tamale snuffed it.' Carmona made no comment. I didn't know who El Tamale was, but seeing the news of his death received with such indifference terrified me" (106).

unforgivable stereotypes.[32] He is often pedantic in his explanations, as is evidenced in how "he explained to me the importance of the 'wound as a transsexual construct'…'very postmodern, beyond gender'" (90). He is repeatedly obtuse in his requests for collusion, demonstrated by his observation that "Mexico is magical, but confusing", and a subsequent request that the narrator help "figure out which parts are horrible and which parts are Buñuel-esque." (90). The narrator contends most with the exploitative qualities of Katzenberg's project objectives, which he complains about by sarcastically explaining that "[Katzenberg] hired me to be his contact with the genuine. But it was hard for me to satisfy his appetite for authenticity" (90). The acerbity of the narrator is an obvious critique of "subjectifying forces [like Katzenberg] which inferiorize and homogenize non-Western peoples…and how the scholarly practices replicate their forces" (Saldívar).

The narrator expounds on this latter point of how Katzenberg, true to the gringo stereotype, is blind to the realities of the cultural world he is immersing into (albeit sterilely):

> He wanted a reality that was like Frida's paintings, ghastly but unique. Katzenberg didn't understand that her famous traditional dresses were now only to be found on the second floor of the Museo de Antropología, or worn on godforsaken ranches where they were never luxurious or finely embroidered. He also didn't

[32] Interesting to note is how the parents of Yolo, a character in Luis Alberto Urrea's novel *Into the Beautiful North*, appear to illustrate a similar pedantry inspired by a sense of scholastic superiority: "Her parents had been infected with folkore mania, a real danger among liberal Mexicans with college educations. Her father had made it through one year of university, and thus well-connected to his Toltec past, he and Yoloxochitl's [Yolo] mother had decided to christen their offspring with Nahuatl names" (Urrea 20).

> understand that today's Mexican woman takes pains to wax the honest mustache…(91)

Katzenberg creates a "hyper-Mexican" experience in his mind of what the culture and people "are"; anything else (i.e., reality) is unacceptable. The disdain that this cultivates in the narrator is apparent when he attempts to introduce Katzenberg to an actual expert of Mexican art. Much to the narrator's exasperation, he refuses to meet with him since, in the words of Katzenberg, he "didn't need an *African* source" (92, emphasis mine). This is an ironic assertion considering how he presents himself as a foreign expert on Mexico, but is deeply offended, even resentful, of the suggestion to consult with *another* foreigner. Indeed, for Katzenberg, not only would such an interaction lack the particular brand of authenticity he was scouting, it was also deeply perturbing (bordering on a threat) that the expert could possibly "honor so many cultures at once" (92), or that an individual could exist who harbors more (truthful) knowledge than himself.

Katzenberg's forceful projections of what is appropriately Mexican seems to be the driving factor that ultimately leads him further down a road of interacting with *in*authenticity, boarding on preposterous in how exaggerated the cultural contact and constructions become. Such grandiose embellishment is apparent in three particular examples: the "cobbled together fertility rite" (93), the narrator's reason for not visiting him after being mugged in the taxi,[33] and culminating in the staged kidnapping at the hands of a drug dealer (105-106). The latter situation is the most extreme:

> They took off his hood once a day so he could contemplate an altar covered in a strange combination of images: Catholic, pre-Hispanic, postmodern. A Virgin

[33] "I told him I was busy because a witch had put the evil eye on me" (94).

> Guadalupe, an obsidian knife, dark sunglasses. In the afternoons, they played 'The End' by the Doors, for hours and hours. Behind him, someone imitated the anguished, drugged-out voice of Jim Morrison. The torture had been terrible, *but it had helped him understand the Mexican apocalypse*. (128).

The reader may be inclined to search for cultural meaning in the above events just as Katzenberg would (and presumably did), though the conclusion would inevitably be that they are meaningless, a cut-and-paste compilation of token images. The theory is confirmed when the reader and narrator realize that an investigation into culpability would not be necessary. The kidnapping of Katzenberg was staged by Gonzalo, an eccentric friend of the narrator, who seized the opportunity to create a unique juxtaposition in which the inauthenticity of the narrator appears to, for the first time, trump that of Katzenberg.

In a moment of confrontation, Gonzalo explains that Katzenberg specifically sought out the narrator to know what to avoid writing about in his second project. Both friends recognize that the "garbage" he wrote about before was merely "bullshit" fed by the narrator "to placate [a] need for exoticism" (131). The unforeseen consequence for the narrator was not realizing how strongly his own assumptions and prejudices fueled the increasing levels of exaggeration and absurdity of "the bullshit" that he fed his all-too-eager client. As Gonzalo declares to the narrator, "you're the original faker" (132), somewhat releasing Katzenberg from at least a bit of culpability for having written as trivializing an article as he did since, essentially, he was led astray by the one individual with the opportunity to enforce authenticity rather than perpetuate fraud. Even in its absurdity, Gonzalo "immersed Katzenberg in the reality he so yearned for"

(131), one that was more reliable than any of the scenarios constructed by the narrator, the very person who harbored umbrage towards Katzenberg's pursuit of a "Mexican experience".

The two principal characters of *Amigos Mexicanos*, the narrator and Katzenberg, conflict in two fundamental ways: pretentious posturing and a pathological need for fabrication. First, Katzenberg is clearly Villoro's instrument to illustrate habits and tendencies of the "ugly American" that are bothersome and exasperating in their persistence and prolongation in regard to relating to and interacting with "a Mexican" and "lo mexicano" in and of the twenty-first century. The narrator, on the other hand, derives his sense of self-importance from the tradition of having been a "product", always taken advantage of and exclusively serving a servile and imbecilic purpose, presented with his own exploitative opportunity to deceive his American "client". This could perhaps be framed as an inversion of the *chingón*/*chingada* model, with Katzenberg assuming the role of the *chingada* while the narrator somewhat revels in this opportunity to be the *chingón*.

Second, Katzenberg needs to be lied to in order to find "truth". He initially relies on the deceptions during his first go-round with the narrator to achieve reputable publication and accolade (spinning them into gringo friendly digestible narrations), while in the second he relies on catching on to the narrator's lies and exaggerations in addition to the kidnapping scenario (which is, unbeknownst to him, fabricated) to pursue genuineness. Differently, the narrator needs to lie in order to find "truth", yet curiously it is not until he is caught in lying and confronted for the consequences of the lies (i.e., Katzenberg fictitiously being kidnapped and sincerely almost losing his job) that he frees himself from his own obsessions with the burden of "liv[ing] in a colonial world" in which "Americans tak[e] advantage of us [Mexicans]" (94). Here, the reader

again experiences the millenniality of Villoro's writing and character development. He offers a third possible conclusion for the narrator that is neither the all-too-familiar and infuriating *chingada* role of the past nor the surprisingly unsatisfying role of the *chingón*, but rather a place that is beyond both into an uncharted new frontier.

One cannot help but wonder if the character of Katzenberg is a veiled attempt by Villoro to illustrate a literary contestation of gringo writers represented by Katzenberg that consistently and inappropriately cross the line from "information" to "titillation" and "fetish", relying on the warping of images to become better suited to the U.S. audience for consumption (Fregoso 13-14). Fregoso makes the case that the manipulation of such images is used to discuss the disturbing commodification of the Mexican female body and Mexican territorial body (specifically the border), it is nevertheless applicable to the scenario here for the assertions of how such writers exert a misplaced colonial reach that, for her, darkens any potential for bicultural dialogue and/or contribution.

Fregoso, who takes umbrage with actual twentieth century U.S. writers,[34] aligns with sentiments of embitterment expressed by the fictitious narrator towards desiring "alternatives to the 'dirty Mexican', the 'degenerate and menacing Mexican bandido' that has terrorized the cultural imaginary of the West" (31).[35] Perhaps then the narrator's function is to offer what Fregoso terms the "greatest opposition to the colonialist project" (31) by refusing to filter his own self-image through the customary U.S. "white, benevolent, patriarchal gaze" (49) via his mockery and exploitative pranks. Fregoso posits that "the racial superiority of whites depends on

[34] Specifically, Charles Bowden.
[35] See Chapter One.

portrayals of Mexican inferiority (their criminality, brutality, and degeneracy)" (140), though while Katzenberg would have the narrator believe that he is benevolent in the beginning of their encounters, he is neither benevolent nor superior by the end of *Amigos Mexicanos* as a result of the kidnapping prank; the stunt thoroughly subordinates him by leveraging the "Mexican kitsch" and quaintness that is thought to breed an inferiority complex in outsiders (Americans) superficially participating in intercultural observation and exchange.

While commentary abounds in regard to the narrator's stance on his northern neighbors, subtler is the insight towards his sentiments about what is taking place in Mexico as he, a Mexican, lives it. Four examples stand out:

- The narrator's comment regarding the cocaine in his pocket: "Pancho sold top-notch product; it would be a crime to dump it" (107).
- The (correct) suspicion that the police planted marijuana in the narrator's car to be discovered: "They made a big show of opening the glove compartment and pulling out a baggie of marijuana. While I'd been hiding the coke, they'd been planting this lesser drug in my car" (107).
- The insinuations of their trying to extort: "The grunt cops took their hopes of extortion elsewhere" (108).
- The TV commercial written by the narrator: "The message couldn't be any more contradictory: poverty seems to be simultaneously resolved and undefeatable. The shot pulls out to show a barren landscape. It's as if the government were saying, 'We've done what little we could' (113)".

These instances are striking for two reasons: first, for the manner in which the narrative tone changes from the thickly derisive tenor that the narrator largely speaks with to one that is more direct and candid, less embellished with sarcasm and malignity. Second, these are the only moments in the short story in which the reader garners a concept of what the narrator thinks about his "real" Mexico (Mexico as he lives and breathes it); the same Mexico that Katzenberg is desperately seeking to uncover but is consistently thwarted from doing so, ironically, by the narrator.

Perhaps Katzenberg is instead illustrative of another abrasive über gringo behavioral pattern that grates on Villoro's characters: the carnivalization of "lo Latino" as carried out by real-life author Ilan Stavans in *Latino USA: A Cartoon History*. While comics are the focus of Chapter Four, it is worthwhile to briefly mention this particular text here as a real-world comparison example as there are certain editorial decisions carried out by Stavans that, when considered against *Amigos Mexicanos*, suggest more than a little coincidence in relation to Villoro's Katzenberg character.

For example, the reader's first introduction to Stavans in *Latino USA* is the following: "The Author, Scientific name *Deus obnoxious spanglishicus*" (xvi). In a move that perhaps implies possessing more self-awareness than Katzenberg, who does not realize how he is the object of his own aloof socio-cultural follies, Stavans opts to define himself from the get-go in consciously selected terms that are decidedly self-effacing. His introduction goes on to claim how he is "[r]esponsible for the following mess" and that "most of us here don't really like him" (Stavans xvi). Rather than achieve a laugh at his own expense, he precariously positions himself in the role of "obnoxious Spanish-speaking God-Author" (Allatson 233). This positioning

reminds of Katzenberg's many allusions about his *mexicano* and *México* omnipotence (savyy that is universally off the mark). This God-Author-Culturist stance is again apparent with several secondary character choices, namely a toucan, who declares how he and his fellow cohort should be grateful that the author (Stavans) created them at all, and a *calavera*, who lauds the author for having been an "exemplary historian", one who has not "miss[ed] any major event in [Latino] history so far" (Allatson 235, Stavans 59).

Other ancillary characters in Stavan's graphic historiography are La Maestra, Cantinflas (a Mexican film star), El Santo (a masked *luchador*), and Captain America (adversary to El Santo). It appears that the role of these characters is to punctuate the journey through Hispanic history with cheeky zingers and corroborative one-liners,[36] but it would be more accurate to hone in on how their carnivalized appearances and behaviors offer more of a "damaging trope of latinidad" than perhaps the "irreverent historical entertainment" Stavans sought (Allatson 232, 239). As Allatson points out, Stavans feels as though such carnivalizations are harmless due to reliance on a brand of "intellectual cosmopolitanism" (also interpreted as simple superiority),[37] much in the same way Katzenberg initially hides behind his self-stated expertise and sanitized musings of what Mexico "is" and who *mexicanos* "are" (243).

III. Into the Beautiful North

For Katzenberg and the gringo readers of his publications, uncovering twenty-first century Mexican socio-cultural genuineness proves elusive (for reasons that he both is and is not

[36] See pages 238-243 of Allatson for a fantastic discussion of Stavans's application of the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic*.
[37] "I write in English for Americans about topics they know little about, and I write in Spanish for Mexicans about topics they are unacquainted with. I act as a bridge, I symbolize dialogue…I am the owner of a divided self" (Stavans, as quoted in Allatson 243).

accountable for). For the principal characters in Luis Alberto Urrea's novel, *Into the Beautiful North*, Nayeli, Yolo, Vampi, Tacho, and Aunt Irma, an interesting contrast emerges when compared to the above works by Villoro in regard to the task of revealing identifiable self-determinations for Mexicans in a twenty-first century globalized context. Truths that Katzenberg was incapable of identifying become revelatory for Urrea's characters to really see (literally and figuratively) their country for the first time. It is also within this text that the four themes identified in the newspaper headlines of Chapter One - - patience and conformity on behalf of Mexican policies towards the U.S., heroization of border crossers, the blurring of *terrorismo* and *turismo*, and ultimately becoming fed up with the "fantasy" - - are again evident in regard to U.S.-Mexican relations from 2000 onward.

Urrea opens the novel by framing how all of the events that transpire occur as a result of two factors: first, the moving in of *bandidos* (associated with the Sinaloa drug cartel) to the Tres Camarones town, and second, nearly all of the men having left the town to seek work in *el norte* as a result of the severe devaluation of the *peso* that occurred in the 1990s. The reader is quickly informed that the term "immigration" was not one in common usage or even recognized, and that this remote town, as had happened to many others, was one that "the modern era had somehow passed by" (Urrea 4). Additionally, the manner in which the *narco* characters are conveyed - - generally masquerading and moronic - - is curious. It is perhaps Urrea's way of hinting that public perceptions of *narco* posturing was transitioning from fear and adulation to annoyed and disinterested.[38]

[38] See Chapter Three.

This mass exodus of men is the most prominent factor that inspires the four friends - - three young women and one homosexual - - to embark on their journey through Mexico to the United States in an effort to repatriate them and save their town from *narco bandidos*. A starkly millennial hero/heroine choice in characters, Urrea participates in the usage of a border-crossing centric plot to serve as a "metaphor and a tool to analyze heterogeneity of identity" (Aldama 42). While it may appear as though Urrea is leveraging a tone of exaggeration in order to create a plot-worthy set of circumstances by describing how people in Tres Camarones would yell *"¡Adiós!"* to acquaintances on the street as a greeting (19), in reality he is describing towns that have lost all of their husbands, sons, and male peers to the United States, a social issue of increasing importance with consequences that are ever-more unavoidable. Three points emerge as particularly relevant to the discussion at hand: what about Mexico is exposed to the main characters travel north, the "flip-flopping" of *mexicano* and U.S. stereotypes ripe with irony, and the salvation of Tres Camarones by young, female heroines (particularly Aunt Irma, a histrionic feminist).

To begin with the first, the four young friends embark upon a journey that appears to be the instrument leveraged by Urrea to address misconceptions towards "how much" what seem to be average Mexican youth are aware of in regard to contemporary Mexican life and circumstance as defined by the American gaze southward. Yes, they live elements of cartel occupation and predictably alluring *el norte* stereotypes that most certainly contain truth in terms of everyday living, but particularly while still in Tres Camarones such banalities are represented as campy and enigmatic respectively. Through Nayeli, Yolo, Vampi, and Tacho's naivety, it is subtly communicated that "they" (millennial *mexicanos*) are not "all" in possession of some clandestine

border-crossing promotive manual, nor working in collusion against the United States people and government to invade, breed, and re-conquer as is so often suggested by narratives propagated by American media (Chavez, "Latino Threat" and "Covering Immigration"). They are naïve and ill prepared, almost gringo-esque in their gullibility and naivety. Indeed, these four teenagers experience the same shock and discomfiture towards the level of violence and sex discrimination on border trails and in border towns that has become such a wide subject of interest in U.S. television and print media. In this way, these characters best illustrate how millennial border writing and border stories are not always about physical borders such as the actual U.S.-Mexican divide (though that is certainly an important plot device in this novel), but often more importantly in the millennium about addressing, confronting, and re-negotiating cultural borders as well.

Individual bewilderment towards the state of their country (of which they were seemingly not aware) is conveyed by the following reactions: "It'll be a miracle if we survive traveling through our own country", says Yolo; "Did you know it would be like this?", asks Nayeli, and "I'm not worried about the Yunaites [United States] anymore", answers Tacho" (78). The group's feelings of consternation only increase as they approach Tijuana. Looking out the windows of a bus, "[None] of them could believe the world they had entered" (85), one with "shacks and huts", where "fences appeared as all trees vanished" and "shantytowns surrounded the dusty center" (86). They find themselves as houseguests in a *dompe pueblo* (garbage dump village) from where it was possible to see into the United States, and where Nayeli experiences the first of three moments of candid contemplation:

> It shook her, this place. It was awful. Tragic. Yet…yet it moved her. The sorrow she felt. It was profound. It was moving, somehow. The sorrow of the terrible

abandoned garbage dump and the sad graves and the lonesome shacks made her feel something so far inside herself that she could define it or place it (119).

Urrea, in his book *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border*, offers further insight into such *dompe pueblo* realities:

> One of the most beautiful views of San Diego is from the summit of a small hill in Tijuana's municipal garbage dump. People live on the hill, picking through the trash with long poles that end in hooks made of bent nails. They scavenge for bottles, tin, aluminum, cloth; for cast-out beds, wood furniture. Sometimes they find meat that is not too rotten to be cooked. This view-spot is where the city drops off its dead animals – dogs, cats, sometimes goats, horses. They are piled in heaps six feet high and torched. In that stinking blue haze, amid nightmarish sculptures of charred ribs and carbonized tails, the garbage-pickers can watch the buildings of San Diego gleam gold on the blue coastline…San Diego glows like a big electric dream. And every night on that burnt hill, these people watch" (32).

The *dompe* setting creates an opportunity for one of the two secondary male characters to emerge: Atómiko.[39] An inhabitant of this particular *dompe* plot, his initial encounter with Nayeli is punctuated by cat-calling and attempts to receive a kiss, reminiscent of typical *machismo* behavior. Yet the reader is quickly endeared to his oddball behavior as his true character, one that is honest, protective, and brave, reveals itself. Atómiko appears to be almost feminist in his unrelenting support for Nayeli and her cohort's mission. He is not at all threatened by their strong-willed nature, which positions him entirely against the grain in terms of typical Mexican

[39] The second being Chava.

macho characters of the past. His millennial swagger does not force him to sacrifice one (masculinity) for the other (femininity) but facilitates a confident and assertive occupation of both roles. He is an alternative narrative to both of Villoro's male lead characters (Julián and the disenchanted vindictive narrator); an alternative to the preoccupation with both the phallus and *norte* neighbor complexes.

A second incident of similar preoccupation occurs after the Border Patrol apprehends the group of teens during an attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexican border in Chapter Sixteen. Observing the holding pens, Nayeli ponders how

> Most of the people herded into the pens were like them. Just…people. Small, brown, tired people. Nayeli was stunned to see mothers with children – kids weeping and snot faced…[She] looked at the migra agents through the iron mesh. Big men. Happy, bright-faced men. Shiny and crisp. Green uniforms. Short hair. Mustaches. What made them different from her? She could not tell (155).

Nayeli is navigating a discourse of otherization that has long been a staple of border writing. Here she is confronted with herself being "otherized", a sensation of which is remarkably uncomfortable and unexpected for her since she had not ever conceived of herself as such, along with the contemplation of the "violent otherization" she witnesses in the above holding-pen, fear-riddled, communicatively inhibited scenario.

Finally, now having crossed into the U.S., a third ruminative moment akin to the above takes place when Chava Chavarín, an old romantic interest of Irma who lived in the U.S. and became a part of the haphazard crew, took Nayeli to Camp Guadalupe, a local informal migrant camp, to potentially recruit the younger workers for the repatriation mission:

> Chava said, ‘This is the richest country in the world.’ He looked at each of them. ‘This is the richest state of that rich country.’ They watched him. ‘And this is probably the richest city of the richest state of the richest country’…They could smell the camp before they saw it: smoke, trash, human waste…Improvised tents were gathered in a rough U shape. Splintery poles propped up sheets of plastic…They had managed to hammer together a little wooden shrine…In it, covered by a shingle roof, standing on a small shelf, was a statue of the Blessed Mother (248-249).

Here the discourse shifts towards Nayeli confronting that of inferiorization, the “barrier and zone of violence for the Mexican or Latino who is confronted by racialist and gendered obstacles…anywhere s/he goes in the United States – a continual shifting from margin to margin” (Aldama 46). While Nayeli is the character whose internalization of the journey is most strongly conveyed to the reader, these three moments in particular are more striking than other introspections that she shares. They stand out for their likeness; all three instances evoke a palpable sense of stripping away preconceptions and, more importantly, acquainting her with a much more complex Mexico than perhaps she was initially anticipating (similar to the narrator’s ruminations and narrative tone change in *Amigos Mexicanos*). The result is a heightened sense of urgency that increases as each of the above three moments are absorbed to achieve their mission: to bring back Mexicans to their Mexican communities so that they might prosper for the benefit of Mexico.

It is vital that much of Nayeli’s personal growth and realization occur in conjunction with areas of borders and boundaries (the U.S.-Mexican border, the less tangible border between the

immigrant community she meets, and then state borders as she embarks on the multi-state effort to locate her father). The borderland becomes the space that instigates processes of re-negotiation for Nayeli. This is possible because of her millenniality with which she is not as bound to stagnant social, cultural, political, or national definitions (or rather, she is of a generation that accepts and expects fluidity and mobility), but also due to the nature of a borderland being such that cultures constantly overlap (Wyatt 244). Nayeli and her cohort are products of boundary blurring; "el otro lado" could refer to either the Mexican or the U.S. side, "shifting its referent according to where the speaker stands" (Wyatt 244).

In this way, Nayeli is a prime example of a millennial voice since the border fluidity and blurring, coupled with multi-directional gaze, means that "fixed [racial, social, cultural, and gender] definitions waver as the words in which they are moored lose their stability" (Wyatt 244). Indeed, Urrea's entire narrative destabilizes long held norms, outright side-stepping and defying "Mexican icons of sexuality and motherhood…in order to redefine [their] own possibilities as a woman" (Wyatt 243). None of the female characters subscribe to Malinche or Llorona traits or tendencies, instead carving out their own narrative space to lead, take action, and embrace their roles as female heroines of their nation and communities.

The second point of interest, Urrea's stratagem to "flip-flop" Mexican and U.S. stereotypes is significant, particularly after examining how firmly Villoro roots his characters into narratives that purposefully highlight the archetypal priggish American with the fainéant (*Mariachi*) and rancorous Mexican (*Amigos Mexicanos*). While minor examples are sprinkled throughout the first half of the book with comments such as, "You know how Americans are…Always late. On their own time" (14), or "They have quaint customs – they aren't really,

shall we say sophisticated like we are" (62), one instance in particular stands out for both its vehemence and resemblance to a prevalent American conservative socio-political stance towards Mexican immigrants who have illegally crossed the border into the United States:

> Irma…spied a Guatemalan woman picking through the spoiled fruit. 'What are you doing?' she snapped. 'Provisions. For the journey north,' the woman replied. She made the mistake of extending her hand and saying, 'I have come so far, but I have so far to go. Alms señora. Have mercy'. 'Go back to where you came from!' Irma bellowed. '*Mexico is for Mexicans*' (36, emphasis mine).

One could easily supplement Irma's assertion that "Mexico is for Mexicans" with any number of circulated sound bites illustrative of the vibrant Latino Threat Narrative in the U.S. As she continues to gush:

> 'These illegals come to Mexico expecting a free ride! Don't tell me you didn't have Salvadorans and Hondurans in your school, getting the best education in the world! *They take our jobs, too'*. She muttered on in her own steamy cloud of indignation…*What we need is a wall on our southern border* (36, emphasis mine).

Indeed, the narrative of illegal Mexican immigrants taking jobs away from Americans is so oft repeated in conservative U.S. media and public spheres that Aviva Chomsky opted to use the catchphrase as the title of her 2007 book, *"They Take Our Jobs!" And 20 Other Myths About Immigration,* in which she systematically discredits twenty-one of the most prevalent (and damaging) twenty-first century narratives surrounding (Mexican) immigrants and the economy, the law, and racial relations.

The third topic of interest considers how the salvation of Tres Camarones was brought to fruition by young, female heroines who appear to break away from the confines of a traditional literary "discourse that discourages women from leaving the private sphere, the purported site of patriarchal protection and authority" and immersing into the "public space" that has so long been "imagined as inherently dangerous" for women characters (Fregoso 18). The very purpose of their mission, to retrieve men who had fled *al norte* seeking work, could imply a dependency on men to "fix" things or to "protect" "them" (the women and feeble) against cartel violence. Yet, consider how the men were recruited: advertisements were placed in newspapers and word spread through "taco shops and barrio stores" precisely to place the "applicants" in a situation of being interviewed and evaluated *by women*, a valuation assessment fronted by Irma in which *she* would have the final say over who would return with them. As the men nervously await their inquisition, they emit a certain unsteadiness in their self-imposed imprisonment being "stuck" in the United States, desperately hoping that a woman, Irma, will "unstick" them and bring them home (literally and symbolically), something they appear to be unable to do on their own.

Kanellos' observation that Mexican national protection and perpetuation is often exclusively the obligation and responsibility of female characters in Latino literature is again evident with Urrea's literary decision to develop nearly exclusive (young) female characters as the heroines of Tres Camarones. While Kanellos suggests that such salvation traditionally occurred "within the domestic sphere" (123), Aunt Irma, Nayeli, and her cohort break completely from this norm as the entirety of their efforts for national deliverance occur well outside of such a space. To draw a parallel with Villoro's *Mariachi,* they are entirely "Brenda-esque" in their ability to assume control of not only their destinies, but of their male counterparts as well.

Neither abandon femininity in favor of masculinity to achieve a more liberated state, but rather incorporate aspects of both, which in turn strengthens (not weakens) their woman-ness.

It is worthwhile to mention a third literary trait of Latino (Mexican) literature observed by Kanellos: the lore of the *verde*, a neophyte "who misinterprets American language and culture and becomes the subject of extreme exploitation" (31). Nayeli would be the logical and obvious candidate to illustrate such a *verde* in this particular narrative as she, the leader of the expedition, possesses no first-hand knowledge of the place to whence she is attempting to voyage. This includes a grasp of the more extreme actual and literal border crossing tactics, legal consequences, physical dangers (sexual and other), and the more mundane American linguistic, currency, and societal norms, all of which would be palpable obstacles to success. Kanellos pessimistically observes how, in literature, time after time (Mexican) immigrants who attempt to pursue the American Dream "fail" and "meet their demise" (57), becoming overwhelmed and undone by devastating and paralyzingly superior American technology and materialism that takes shape in a variety of forms: elevators, subways, skyscrapers, explosives, to name a few (57). Yet Nayeli does not succumb, nor does she fail in her pursuit. Rather, she seems to thrive beginning in the second part of the novel, entitled *Norte*, even after a multitude of obstacles present themselves.

When the moment arrives for Nayeli to commence her personal quest, that of finding her father in Kankakee, Illinois, she embarks on a cross-country journey that spans the distance of half of the U.S. with only her friend Tacho, a mini-van, and a bilingual dictionary. A minivan is a vehicular plot choice that draws a curious parallel with Sandra Cisnero's "Woman Hollering Creek", in which Felice drives a pickup truck as an overt move to co-opt a masculine emblem. It

is a symbolic decision specifically "to enhance a woman's mobility – her own…and that of [another] woman she carries away from abuse" (Wyatt 261). It appears that the choice of a minivan is Urrea's way of adopting a massively U.S. image as a symbol to enhance the Mexican-U.S. cross(ing)/cross(over) culture vibe of the novel. It also speaks to this identifiable U.S. token as a means for gender, cultural, social, and territorial mobility. Nayeli literally fulfills the notion that by "cross[ing] spatial boundaries and borders" she (a woman) is able to "blur, disrupt, and resist them", thus figuratively embodying the concept that in doing so females are able to access new spaces, unavailable to male counterparts, within which social change and revolution is able to take place (Kanellos 109). It offers the reader a millennial token, that of using literature filled with strong female characters to advocate and appreciate "women's alternatives" and "a new range of female possibilities" in literature as in life (Wyatt 258). Indeed, the novel concludes with the triumphant return of Nayeli to Tres Camarones with her male charges in tow.

This very closely relates to what Fregoso terms as "a new identity formation of cross-border feminisms" (47). The manner in which Aunt Irma breaks with gender traditions that would have been imposed on a woman of her generation is best evidenced through her mayoral campaign venture during which she wholly rejects the social and mental conditioning that women were "too moody, flighty, illogical, and incapable" to take on the role of Municipal President (Urrea, "Beautiful North", 39). It was Irma who "cajol[ed]" and "curs[ed]" them (the women) "out of their ruts" (39), and Nayeli, of the next generation, who served as the "driving force among the young of the village" (39), both representative of a trending away from the traditional nationalist discourse in which, according to Fregoso, women represent constant closed conservatism while men represent progressivity and modernity (77). Irma and Nayeli are neither

inert nor backward looking, nor are they illustrative of Mexico's conservative gendered principals.

For the men in the novel, even Tacho (a homosexual), Atómiko (an enlightened, ostentatious former soldier who voluntarily and proudly resides in the *dompe*),[40] and Chava (Irma's former flame), derive their "forward-thrusting" and potency from Irma and Nayeli, suggesting that progressive modernized twenty-first century nationalism is both activated and actualized by women seizing "a new kind of femininity" (Urrea 42). Indeed, the identities of these two lead heroines "deliberately challenge sexual and gender norms, transgress gender roles, thwart behaviors and expectations, and defy dominant…boundaries of domesticity and femininity (Fregoso 96).

Kanellos substantiates the notion that Aunt Irma and Nayeli essentially break the mold of Mexican social and literary gender expectations.[41] In developing such strong female protagonists, Urrea achieves a narrative that illustrates the increasingly urgent demand to "challenge the imposition of American culture" and to "preserve a Hispanic past" (and prospect for a future) that is in constant peril to U.S. commercial exploitation and takeover (Kanellos 102). Nayeli in particular becomes a "transmigrant woman" who unabashedly challenges and shatters stereotypes about *Latina* docility.[42] The fact that much of this occurs while she is physically in the United

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[40] According to Urrea, "*dompe* is border-speak, a word in neither Spanish nor English. It is an attempt to put a North American word or concept – "dump" – into a Mexican context" (*Across the Wire* 31).
[41] It is important to note her that Kanellos is referring to Mexican literature that is written by male authors, not female.
[42] It is interesting to observe that Aunt Irma (of an older generation) is quite upfront about having neither the desire nor the energy to embark on the journey *al norte* herself and obliges Nayeli (of a younger generation) to lead the expectation, perhaps symbolic of a type of cultural passing of the torch.

States is significant; she is essentially "within enemy lines" of hostile anti-Mexican socio-cultural confrontation and yet comes out the victor.

She was not seduced by U.S. materiality or capital and was in fact at times repulsed by the conflicting messages of "the land of opportunity" and "the land of the free", born from the labor of immigrants, contrasted with the hateful vitriol of public radio and multiple enmity-infused interactions that punctuate the entire second half of the novel. In this way, the contrasts between her native Mexico and the United States become increasingly a motivating factor to *not* remain in the U.S. and to return to Tres Camarones as soon, and as proudly, as possible. The U.S. conditioning did not convince her of Mexico's inferiority but rather strengthened how superior and preferable it came to be.

The entire novel is an adventure firmly rooted in third-space feminism, a space within which female characters supporting and even mimicking male ideologues and behaviors (opinionated, brash, physical, etc.), yet doing so to advocate and advance their *own* agenda (Kanellos 106.). Aunt Irma and Nayeli demonstrate in spades the millennial brand of third-space feminism, and are crafted in such a manner by Urrea that they do not depict such comportments as a socio-cultural nuisance, but rather as traits that lead to the personal salvation of several male characters (Chava, Atómiko, and the workers who were selected to return) and the communal salvation of Tres Camarones. The town perhaps serves as a metaphor for the possibility of broader *mexicano* "restoration" if men were to return, women were to lead, and a fixation with the United States were to taper under the guise of a *México* pride movement.

IV. Conclusions

Mary-Lee Mulholland best summarizes two of the terms being challenged by millennial writers such as Villoro and Urrea, *malinchismo* and *marianismo*. She describes the former as the "perceived inferiority complex in Mexico that leads to some Mexican privileging or preferring [of] foreign things (as did Malinche apparently)" while the latter, its counterpart, as that which "determines the parameters of acceptable femininity in Mexico" (360). It is because of millennial writers and millennial consumers that such literature is being written (and perhaps more importantly, is fantastically marketable). Yet, it is also out of such literature that the millennial perspective and agenda will be issued from, propagated, and consumed, compelling future *mexicano* narratives of nation and self forward into yet to be defined spheres.

There is a parallel to be drawn between the images being contested in Villoro and Urrea's works discussed above and that of the *narco* badboy and/or bandit persona to be examined in Chapter Three. In both instances, a tried-and-true visual is co-opted to serve an ulterior motive and to challenge past meanings of representations. While the literary contestations evident in *Los culpables* and *Into the Beautiful North* appear to produce narratives that positively advance millennial agendas of renegotiating gender, race, territory, nation, and the like away from outmoded identity constructions, internal and external representations of self as crooned about in *narco corridos* and strutted around by *narco* fanboys and girls appear to inject a sinister dynamic into the millennial trend of narrative renegotiation taking place in Mexico and the U.S.-Mexican border region.

Chapter Three

Duplicity of Narco Fanboyism

Fig. 10. *Narcocorrido: Expresión de crisis social* from the blog Música Norteña.

This analysis has moved from the broad public expression of newspaper headlines to the more intimate format of novels and short stories and will now examine the more profound experimentation found in popular music. In this chapter, we focus on the musical genre of *narco corridos* to delve even deeper into mediums of narrative creation and consider it against yet another expression of millennial renegotiation. Composition, calculated distribution, and systematic popularization of *narco* centric songs are demonstrated to be not nearly as happenstance as one might initially credit such a popular culture phenom, but rather emerge as a sinister iteration of internal recasting efforts within the Mexico of the twenty-first century. *Narco corrido* songs also prove themselves to be a third example of a cultural product that demonstrates the four themes first seen in the headlines of Chapter One and again in the literature of Chapter Two: patience and conformity on behalf of Mexican policies towards the U.S., heroization of border crossers, the blurring of *terrorismo* and *turismo*, and ultimately becoming fed up with a "fantasy".

A deeper complexity emerges when considering these four broad themes against the *narco corrido* song lyrics selected for this Chapter. While previously, the patience and conformity were identified as a typical socio-political posture assumed broadly by Mexico towards the U.S., here, what becomes evident is how such modus operandi are directed inwards via an internal power structure of cartels/*narcos* and the communities under their domain. Heroization of border crossers was a predominant topic in the *corridos* up until the 1980s and 1990s when adulation both became more murderously bombastic and shifted attention to those who not only broke laws and took risks, but did so in an extreme style that was violent. The third theme again turns inward to recount *terrorismo* on a more domestic scale, or rather enacted at the hands of *narco valientes*. Communal internal fatigue is the manner in which the fourth theme emerges with communities and potential *narco* recruits becoming disillusioned with the fantasy of power, wealth, and privilege that is earned through a cadaverous way of life. By highlighting this particular niche of popular Mexican millennial music and musicians, the conversation here seeks to plot origins of the *narco corrido* genre in order to aptly discuss how it is that distinctive aspects of the *movimiento alterado* millennial iteration of it have transpired, and to consider the ethics of a duplicity exhibited by specific individuals involved in the creation and circulation of *movimiento alterado* music, and the impact therein of socio-cultural deception.

Movimiento alterado uniquely "provokes social and cultural dynamics on both the micro and macro levels of society" (Simonett 316). While *narco corridos* are not a new genre to examine, and much investigative discussion has been produced by individuals such as Elijah Wald, Cathy Ragland, Victor Hugo Viesca, and Helena Simonett, the particular sub-genre occupied by a style known as *movimiento alterado* remains quite under discussed. Indeed, as

Simonett mentions, "…corridos that apologize and glorify drug trafficking are a relatively recent phenomenon" (316). I have selected to focus on this style of music and the group Buknas de Culiacán precisely because such a gap exists in the present body of research surrounding twenty-first century *corridos*, and because they are exemplary for the duplicity of their musical stylings and material marketing.

Closer examination of specific individuals who have contributed to the style and direction of contemporary *narco corridos* from 1920-2017 highlights how their personal perspectives and reactions to broader socio-political happenings swayed the compositional and marketing trajectory of this genre towards the contemporary *alterado* extreme. This brief timeline of the *corrido* genre demonstrates the scholarship that exists about such fundamental contributors as Los Tigres del Norte and Chalino. More to the point, this brief vista highlights how millennial iterations of this historically fundamental Mexican musical genre are missing from the dialogue and demonstrates how *narco corridos* emerged therein. The conversation presented here endeavors to fill the gap by both analyzing millennial *movimiento alterado* contributors and imagining the next *narco* (*corrido*) narrative. I will show how certain themes such as smuggling, outsmarting gringo authorities, Mexican local and national pride, and seeking financial and material gain repeat themselves over decades, yet also how they have morphed into a more nihilistic approach in terms of composition, performance, and consumption. I will also suggest possible areas of comparison between *narco corridos* of past generations and those being popularized by millennials.

The term "fanboy" used in this Chapter's title draws attention to consequences of blind loyalty on behalf of *narco corrido* and *movimiento alterado* devotees. While originally a term

that emerged in the online gamer community, it has spread to other cultural products and outlets in the millennium, particularly those with a social media and Internet presence easily accessible by consumers. At its most basic, a "fanboy" or "fangirl" can be defined as "an excessively loyal fan of a product and/or its company who blindly supports every action of said product/company without question or reasoning" (Meixsell). This Chapter's discussions will facilitate a consideration of the present-day effects that bombastic embellishments of lyrical and physical façades have had on social and cultural psyche with a particular emphasis on the ominous brand of "fanboyism" as inspired by *movimiento alterado*.

I. Raíces profundas

Well-worn routes that facilitated veiled commerce exchanges to avoid import/export taxation and other "priggish" elements of early twentieth century trade economics were deeply entrenched by the time the U.S. government attempted to enforce Prohibition in the 1920s. Cross-border smuggling of desired yet elusive goods such as alcohol quickly solidified into a surreptitiously booming transnational business model. Efforts to exploit the insatiable *gringo* appetite were capitalized on by *tequileros*, smugglers laden with booze to hawk at an increased profit margin. When Prohibition ended in 1933, *tequileros* simply shifted their market interests to other highly sought illicit product sectors, due to the obvious fertility of the bootleg market. Increased attention to smuggling activity, coupled with the Great Depression, created a perfect platform in the U.S. to embark on campaigns to stoke national fears about supposedly dodgy, penurious Mexicans pouring across the border. Narratives abounded with disparaging messages

saturated with nativist and racist tones, representing the first real emergence of a consistently calculated and Latino oriented threat narrative in the twentieth century.[43]

The first real *narco* themed *corrido* was written in 1934 and could be viewed as a response to such aggressive campaigns sweeping the U.S. to relegate Mexican migrant and immigrant communities to a permanent "other" and inferior status on the one hand, yet consciously increasing industry dependence on Mexican migrant labor on the other. "Contrabandista" recounts the story of a smuggler who falls into trouble with the *gringo* law for trafficking "illegal inebriants" into Texas (Wald 13). While it did not achieve tremendous commercial success at the time, the aggrieved-centric themes chronicled in the song began to pique the subconscious interest of a growing audience who could either identify with the necessitous nature of the smuggler's plight, sympathize with the justifications for his line of work, or who were increasingly in search of forms of expression that reflected their feelings of marginalization, discrimination, and need.

In contrast to the *narco corridos* of later decades, "Contrabandista" is not necessarily a glorification of the smuggler or *bandito* lifestyle, but rather laments, preaches, and forewarns others. The smuggler advises his listeners to take heed of the serious mistake he made by underestimating Texan lawmen who were relentless, shrewd, and ruthless in enforcement and national/state protection. He cautions novices to not be entranced by the quick ascendancy towards wealth and materiality that will come from peddling goods and alludes to how his becoming overly cocky in his business pursuits resulted in paying a huge price (going to jail).

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[43] See Chapter One.

The tone of this early *narco corrido* contrasts sharply with that of later examples of the genre. While our troubadour begins by listing two flashy prized items that he was able to afford as a result of *bootlegiando* (a car and house) he immediately reflects that his own bewitchment with garish capital, coupled with legal and logistical ignorance, resulted in a loss that he actually regrets. He assumes a reflective posture bordering on proselytization.As will become evident in the examination of the Buknas de Culiacán repertoire, a millennial *corrido alterado* take on this same situation would likely involve a greater emphasis on the personal eminence achieved by possessing such wealth as exclusive name brand products, for being audacious enough to plainly hawk prohibited inebriants, a complete disregard bordering on fanatical ire at being caught, and perhaps even a call for revenge on his behalf.

Another variance emerges in how the narrator speaks about his "product". Rather than venerate himself for having access to it (let alone serving as a collectively esteemed dealer), he conveys that his dreadful loss of personal and material freedom is the direct result of his regrettable involvement with the contraband. Our smuggler rogue goes on to discuss his treatment at the hands of the "American law" enforcers where "en las celdas más calientes" he was abandoned "con cadenas" for two months and a day. As if the admonition and description of his incarceration were not convincing enough for smuggler peers or potential recruits to either be more vigilant or to leave the smuggling business entirely in pursuit of more "honest" work, he concludes the *corrido* with a despondent "adios" to his hometown where "no conocí el miedo", painting a picture of a peaceable *pueblo* and past and reinforcing a bit of homeland pride (albeit mournful). His grief is solidified when "al final" he receives notice that his mother has died, an

event he missed presumably due to the traps of the smuggler lifestyle, and for the vindictiveness of gringo law.

Contrabanda y Traición: A cantar y bailar

The lamentation and warning apparent in "Contrabandista" continued through early and mid-twentieth century *corridos,* featuring rather average (and by millennial standards, downright humdrum) border *bandito* personas. By the mid 1960s the *corrido* genre had undergone acute changes reflective of mounting internal and external social and political tensions on both sides of the border. Lyrical evolution towards a more explicitly confrontational and defensive tendency in *corrido* themes paralleled much of the socio-political happenings of the era. social spheres and public rhetoric shifted abruptly towards more openly communicated brazen pride felt towards their line of work coalescing with the allure of an increasing forbiddance and blackballing.

The influence that the group Los Tigres del Norte (Tigres) has had on the trend of lyrical audacity and in guaranteeing its place as the apex style to imitate in order to achieve commercial success in the (*narco*) *corrido* business, cannot be overstated. Crossing the border into California in 1968 to sing as part of a Mexican Independence Day celebration, the cohort of three brothers and a cousin from Sinaloa, Mexico heard a casual performance of the song "Contrabanda y Traición". While the lyrics grabbed their attention immediately, they were struck by a curious melodic and choral juxtaposition that impacted the trajectory of countless future *narco* oriented *corrido* compositions (Ragland 142-143, Wald 14).

Ironically, this genre-defining tune was originally composed somewhat haphazardly in 1972 by Ángel González, a Chihuahua native whose only knowledge of drug trafficking was based on rumor. Much of González's other songwriting discusses familial and social problems

and is rife with social and morally directed messages, following largely in the compositional trend seen in the previously discussed “Contrabandista” of the 1930s. As he explains to Elijah Wald, “[w]hen I wrote that corrido, I was working on another project, on another song, and it wasn’t coming. So I put that one aside” (19), essentially stating that one of the most pivotal *corridos* of the first iteration of the *narco* genre was an accidental one-off. This lack of actual first-person contact with the inner workings of the *narco* world is also true of later musicians like BuKnas de Culiacán. The latter also did not possess first-hand knowledge, and generally rely on secondary sources such as blogs for information and anecdotes to croon about in their songs.

Still, it would have been unrealistic for social and political context of the time to not penetrate Rodríguez’s lyrical work given that he was a conscious observer of his environs, no matter how removed he was from actual hands-on or nuts-and-bolts cartel and/or drug smuggling operations. This is particularly true in a songwriting genre such as the *corrido,* which heralds a long tradition of serving as a type of musical broadcast of new and current events. While the previous compositional norms of the “smuggling corrido” genre largely consisted of mundane, unexceptional border personalities merely attempting to skirt the law while earning a tenuous living, the characters of this song represented a larger than life, gallant, lyrical “action film”. To draw an additional parallel to the past *corrido* tendency of highlighting lamentation, counsel, or forewarning, even her reckless nature was conveyed as more of a flashy charm than a disadvantage or cause for ruin (i.e., glorification, even when dealing with murder and malevolence).

One particular component stood out to the Tigres upon hearing “Contrabanda y Traición” performed for the first time: an awkward disconnect between the “mellow” trumpet laden

mariachi instrumentation against the "novelty" of the gripping and haunting "action-packed" harsh narrative (Wald 15). Knowing that the lyrics possessed an important originality, they spent a year attempting to remix the song to achieve more suitable accordance between the harmonies and lyrics. If one is listening to an action-packed oration of flamboyant events, a more aggressive and rapid-paced backdrop is effective as an experiential compliment. Presumably, this was modified not only under the guise of interesting musical experimentation, but with the more self-serving intent to heighten the experience for the listener and thus gain followers interested in hearing (and buying and sharing) more. It was a commercially driven decision, not one necessarily rooted in having any connection to the *narco* culture or lifestyle.

Sound effects served as an additional feature apparent in the revamped Tigres take of "Contrabanda and Traición" that further contributed to how they so successfully recruited listener/audience involvement and induced an emotional response in a premeditated manner. Gunshots, shouting, human voices, engines, tire screeching, airplanes, etc. "all attempt[ed] to place the listener at the heart of the action and to imitate reality as much as possible" (Ragland 142). No longer were the abstract whisperings spun into anapestic lyrics of old-school composers like Rodríguez dependent on the listener's own imagination doing the rest. The new bold inclusion of authentic real-life soundscapes created and perpetuated a tangibility that had not previously existed in the *corrido* genre and became ubiquitous in future iterations of composition and performance (a tactic relied on heavily by the BuKnas de Culiacán). Sound effects coupled with the perfectly struck lyrical balance of imagination and reality assisted in the re-branding of *corridos* because *norteños, sinaloenses*, and gradually broader *mexicanos* had not formerly heard such relatable (and titillating) things with such clarity in a mere song.

Such innovations forever transformed fundamental stylistic and compositional features of *corridos* popularized from 1973 onwards by fusing together the emotion, perspective, and experience of increasingly marginalized and underprivileged *mexicanos* with hyperbole, wit, and a unique interpretation of identifiable "*norteño*- style [northern Mexico, border zone] machismo" (Ragland 143). The Tigres effectively introduced an entirely new protagonist, the *narcotraficante,* into the *corrido* world and "revived" the genre with appealing new aesthetic nuances and fresh socio-political interpretations, ushering it into what was at the time a "new era" of composition and distribution.

The Tigres version of the tune "Contrabanda y Traición" hit a smoldering nerve in the *norteño* socio-cultural sphere, and was the first concrete step towards the mass "sinaloazation" and "fetishizing" of brazen lawlessness in what would become a definitive post-"Contrabanda y Traición" newly *narco* laden *corrido* world. It ushered in a deluge of newly minted *narco*-centric *corridos* at a moment when "Mexico's social, political, and economic fabric ruptured, never to be repaired again", leaving many *mexicanos* on either side of the border with "no hope in [their] own country" (Ragland 145). *Narco corridos* and their addictive and (albeit perplexing) relatable allure became one outlet where frustrations could be cathartically vented on an individual as well as collective scale. The influential power of such significant cumulative response to songs being broadcasted by the Tigres did not go unnoticed by Mexican government officials who were attempting to damage control the social, political, and economic fall out in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Marginalization, exclusion, desperation, and a new emboldened sense of antagonism had been festering in northern Mexico and the southern U.S. border region since the 1960's. In the

U.S., the increasingly bombastic anti-Latino and fear mongering narratives being circulated were leading to legislative attempts such as the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1987 and Proposition 187 in California.[44] A disaffected yet vainglorious sense of actually wanting to assume the identity marker of being a *prohibido* in and outside of *la patria* was beginning to boil. With their finger firmly on the social and political pulse, the Tigres seized the cue, releasing *Corridos Prohibidos* in 1989, a socially and politically charged controversy-centric album replete with songs steeped in their uniquely reformed *corrido* musical style. Even the album cover perpetuated an image of dissident "badass", further popularizing the notion that one could, and should, embrace their *frondeur* in the face of Mexican mollycoddlery and U.S. bigotry: the Tigre members confidently stand in a police lineup with a confrontational leer.

Chalino y el pavoneo

Notions of "*prohibido* and proud" spread like wildfire.[45] The social and political environment that was so conducive to *narco* centric *corridos* being produced and consumed with unparalleled interest increased and gained traction as the twentieth century entered its last decade, a reality perhaps best corroborated by the blossoming of cartel centricity. It was within this climate that Rosalino (Chalino) Sanchez crept into the *narco corrido* scene in the 1980s and early 1990s with a fresh take on *narco* and "street" authenticity that, once again, altered the stylistic and consumptive norms of the musical genre. Chalino's iteration of the *narco* singer-celebrity swagger offered a chronicle style that that had not yet been explored by the Tigres or prior

[44] See Chapters One and Four.

[45] Wald observes how *narco* mania was uniquely able to take such swift and strong root in the Sinaloa region*:* "The Sinaloan supremacy is not simply a matter of having been there first. The drug lords who have come out on top have done so through ruthless exercise of force, and the willingness to resort to violence has long been considered a Sinaloan specialty" (2001).

popular (*narco*) *corrido* singers: the violent escapades recounted in his songs were not general social and political commentary based on communal observation but rather first-person type narratives, a perspective of which was garnered by having lived aspects of the "real" *narcotraficante* way of life (Ragland 161).

Chalino's contribution moved the genre along yet another notch on the *corrido* modus spectrum, further away from sapless narratives offering paternal-esque warning or advice of the 1930s, and more the towards hot-headed, brash, cocky, and brutality-praising riotous adulation of 2017. Chalino the *corridista* did not require costuming, embellishment, or tweaking to achieve the level of hype needed to match or penetrate the Tigre dynasty. His pedigree carried an unrivaled level of legitimacy as the "real deal" *sinaloense* gangster type strut because it had been fossilized early in his formative years:

> [w]hen he was a child, a local tough raped his sister and, at age fifteen, Chalino ran into the rapist at a party, walked up to him without saying a word, and shot him to death (Wald 70).

He fled the country, settling in Los Angeles where he diddled around, eventually ending up incarcerated for a brief period of time. His time in jail and the reasons behind his arrest spurred a new career upon release as a songwriter who, in the eyes of his peers, "got it". Commissions poured in from "clients" (*narcotraficantes*, other fellow *valientes*,etc.) who sought musical immortalization and propagation via a type of glorifying musical press release that could transcend literacy, law, and borders.

Communicating the actual profit that one had gained as a result of escapades was no longer the primary objective of a *corrido* commissioning, but rather it was the "spin" that Chalino could conjure to make their exploits, and more importantly themselves, appear to be bigger,

bolder, and more bad than their "wussy" and pedestrian (by comparison) counterparts. Of course, vanity would not be satisfied with merely private or small-scale self-adulation. One's ego must bask publicly to flaunt newfound celebrity status, hence the ensuing need for a client to solicit more and more copies of prized immortalizing cassette compilations in order to be circulated as far and wide as possible, beyond one's immediate clique. Chalino's lyrical style quickly become venerated as "the [one] true voice of the drug traffic", exemplar of the "machos" who were becoming more and more a mainstay presence across *mexicano* communities (Wald 71).

Carefully, Chalino avoided all of the "pop-star trappings" that could in any way suggest that he was "selling out" or betraying his bad guy/tough guy roots. No, indeed he was of the people and for the people, sticking with a style of dress representative of an "every man" blue collar uniform - - simple shirt, modest pants, boots - - and endearing himself by accentuating a disposition suggestive of a "quiet fatalism" that would be easily identifiable to many other "shy, fierce men drinking in cantinas…carrying drugs across the border…or [ready] to kill someone" in order to defend one's honor (Wald 72). Beyond clothes and mannerisms, Chalino would "consciously accentuate" his uniquely Sinaloan "quirks" when speaking, presumably so that this "every man" market would hear themselves in him (Wald 72).

While much of this ploy has been corroborated as being true to Chalino as he really was (Quiñones 1998, Ragland 2009, Wald 2001), it is significant to note that he undoubtedly "knew his audience and carefully preserved the mannerisms that other country-born entertainers worked hard to shed" (Wald 71). For others, it was a hindrance; for Chalino it was a badge of honor that could be maneuvered to fully seize the role of being the one true *corridista* who was narrating and documenting his immediate reality. *Narco corridos* written by Chalino possessed a

"directness and brutality that went beyond anything previously heard", a "goriness" that tapped into an incredibly perverse aspect of a popular culture that, by the 1990s, had been deeply and irrevocably impacted by "narco-nomics" and a disturbingly mundane cartel presence (Wald 73). Such a shift towards unabashed and unapologetic gore is significant since the fact that such carnage was not immediately scandalizing or a turn off for audience and consumers is indicative that a detachment towards it had taken hold. Such detachment suggests a macabre nihilism has since become endemic to Mexican millennial musical production and consumption.

Chalino's fatal flaw was precisely the trait that shot him so quickly to fame: aweless aloofness, at least publicly, towards realities pertinent to personifying aspects of the gangbanging hooligan *narco* lifestyle, and consequences of becoming such a behavioral reference point for the public. Whether or not he was fully aware of how bona fide the type of behavior and subsistence that he was incarnating, propagating, and strengthening had become in ordinary Mexican everyday life under his musical watch is impossible to know. Did he regret cultivating a culture that encouraged reactionary and glorified reprisal? Had others informed him of the danger mounting around public appearances? Or, alternatively, was Chalino proud of the uniquely Mexican fearlessness towards death and conflict that he had stimulated in the modern era?[46] Full disclosure would be impossible. Chalino was murdered in May of 1992, abducted from his car after a show in Culiacán, Mexico by men suspected of posing to be police officers.[47]

Eruption of the Millennial "Alterado"

[46] If it were to be the latter, it would serve as evidence as to how Chalino embodied another aspect of a stereotypical genuine, macho, *mexicano*, the trait with which a "'Mexican' does not fear or avoid death, but rather 'looks at it face to face, with impatience, distain or irony'" (Ragland 162).
[47] It remains unknown who murdered Chalino, or why.

While the Tigres were broad scale, representative of a collective mass voice rather than explicitly individual, Chalino created a niche that brought the fetishization of murderousness and bandit-heroism to a remarkably diacritic level. He capitalized on it by writing and singing commissioned *narco corrido* musical epics from *valientes* who sought hyperbolic immortalization through song. As the twentieth century transitioned to the twenty-first, a new even more extreme iteration of *narco corrido*, in terms of its violence, brashness, and depths of imagination, emerged: the *movimiento alterado*.

By the early 2000s, migration *al norte* had shattered previous migratory records, creating a multiplicity of social, cultural, and political phenomena in response. Different from prior moments of mass deportation, removal proceedings, or forced family/guardian separations, burgeoning social media tools made it possible "to be" there (Mexico) and here (the U.S.), or vice versa, and maintain a near constant stream of information sharing and searching. Grisela Cramer illuminates how this shift towards social media communication and distribution novelized both the millennial trans-border experience between northern Mexico and the southern U.S. border region as well as with internal *mexicano* self-identification, a discussion of which is extremely relevant when examining the *movimiento alterado narco corrido* movement of the 2000s.

While Cramer focuses on radio as a powerfully unifying platform, the essential point of her argument, that mass media sharing apparatuses are the medium with which the prolific "imagined communities" of Benedict Anderson fame are generated in the modern era, can be nearly identically applied to other twenty-first century social media platforms (specifically, music and video distribution sites such as YouTube). Cramer acknowledges an equivalent term to the

notion of imagined communities contrived by Paddy Scannell: "we-ness", or rather a "public, shared, and sociable world-in-common" that is bred by modern mass media mechanisms (Bronfman and Woods 38). For mixed-status U.S. Mexican-immigrant communities of the twenty-first century, experiencing extreme physical and emotional division, and Mexican communities grappling with corruptive politics, poor economic prospects, poverty, and extensive cartel violence, instantaneous and virtual sharing tools such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter established an even stronger "sense of community" than radio (formerly limited to transmission broadcasting range).

Within that "community", no matter how extended it becomes, a type of reciprocal solace is achieved by mimicking "a combination of the school house, the sports stadium, the public rostrum, the newspaper, the theater, the concert hall", and even "the pub, the kitchen, and other spaces of *every day* encounters to this list" (Bronfman and Woods 38). Existence, or the plight of struggle in whatever capacity it manifests, is no longer solitary or "narrow" to one's immediate local surroundings, but becomes communal on a large scale, and suddenly shareable to a network of known and unknown peers. When repeated dozens of times in one's daily life, the sense of affiliation, and subsequent addiction to accessing the network, intensifies and escalates.

In the case of *frontera* region trans-border duality, enforced and reinforced by decades of arbitrary immigration law, begrudged interdependence, and unfulfilled promises, an experience of large-scale belonging afforded by social media ironically becomes exclusionary. Accessing the "club" adds of a level of prestige, or "in crowd" mentality for those enduring exclusion, separation, poverty, or disorder. Cramer makes the point that in its original form, the role that radio played in cultivating such a space where "imagined", subaltern, marginalized, etc.

communities could meet-and-mingle was not necessarily "intentional" or "premeditated" (Bronfman and Woods 38). Research uncovered for this project suggests that the opposite is the case in regard to late twentieth century and twenty-first century *narco corrido* transmission and marketing, promulgated almost entirely online and within alternative networks; indeed, it appears to have been quite intentional from the Tigres onward once the radio outlet became off-limits by virtue of bans and censoring.

Because they were not dependent on radio play, millennial iterations of mass media music sharing guaranteed that banned *movimiento alterado* songs saw the light of day, often hundreds of thousands or even millions of times over. For example, as of November 9, 2017, "El Papel Cambio (Video Oficial)" by El Komander had 130,830,444 views on YouTube. "El Cholo (Official Video)" by Gerardo Ortiz had 36,474,275 views, while "Caballeros Templarios" by BuKnas de Culiacán had 3,281,122 views, to name a few popular contemporary *narco* singers. Attempts at censorship instigated by Presidents Vicente Fox, Felipe Calderón, and the Mexican Senate only increased their popularity. Censorhipelevated curiosity about the songs, fervor to purchase the albums, renown in sharing on social media, and encouragement to play them "loud and proud" in public, all of which cemented *narco corridos* as a genre with intriguing staying power rather than a passing fad once the next "big thing" came along.[48] The ban has continued to contribute to *narco corridos*, and the *movimiento alterado* versions in particular, as being the big thing, not going anywhere anytime soon.

[48] "Because the Mexican Senate is unable to ban narcocorridos thanks to freedom-of-speech legislation, it has pressured individual states to restrict stations from playing them. Between 1998 and 2003, several northern and bordering Mexican states…responded by passing legislation that 'invited' stations to outlaw narcocorridos from the airwaves" (Ragland 182-183).

It would seem that there was a general recognition on behalf of actual cartel members and leaders as both patrons and subjects of *narco corridos* that this song medium was a uniquely powerful tool with which they could exert further control on both a subliminal and overt level. Subconsciously, *narco* men and women seized upon song as a primary contributor for community support building (among their "wannabes"). After the novelty of the Tigres and Chalino, the formula was simple: convince enough individuals to endorse and seek membership in a community (figuratively and literally), and with enough communities (imagined or otherwise) in a region, the scale of national and transnational reach and influence becomes absolute.

The repetitiveness and frequency with which this formula has been applied to composition and marketing is in part what makes it possible to view *narco corridos* as a musically-based communicative tool between generations. Originally, *corridos* (and eventually *narco corridos*) were the medium that the profound societal, political, cultural, and personal preoccupation of each generation extend and/or contradict itself with what has happened, what is happening, and what is hoped to happen for the future. There are several unifying features between "Contrabandista" in 1934 and the BuKnas de Culiacán of the 2000's (and all of the [*narco*] *corridistas* in between):

1. Operating as a chronicle of one's surroundings
2. Venerating fearlessness as a virtue
3. From the Tigres onward, incorporating provocative soundscapes as lyrical accompaniments
4. From Chalino onward, employing a first person narrative perspective

5. Consciously and proudly identifying as *prohibido* and proud

The compositions and performances by the BuKnas de Culiacán demonstrate how these five points continue to flourish. For them, in a circuitous contest to simultaneously outdo and emulate, at the hands of those commissioning, realizing the commission, <u>and</u> purchasing the commissioned product, their *alterado corridos* have become the chosen medium for real-deal and "wannabe" *narcos* alike to craft and perpetuate a celebration of rebelliousness and border-hero mythology.

Still, the millennial take on the genre generally diverges from the formula. When coupled with continuous conversation and collaboration on both sides of the border afforded by social media, the result is unabashedly permitting a space in which a uniquely vibrant and novelized musical sub-genre has not only become merely reflective of "their" own authenticity and image, modeled after broader images of money, power, control, and legal evasiveness (concepts with which betterment may presumably occur), but in which such actuality and recognition is thriving in a capacity that validates the good, bad, and ugly in a much more direct and exposed capacity than ever before.

The chronicle has become a commissioned self-adulation of perceived glory, embellished and exaggerated beyond reality. Whereas before, fearlessness was a virtue to be emulated, the trait has morphed into more of a recklessness (which in turn is viewed as foolishness rather than a desirable or enviable quality). As Helena Simonett points out, "[a]lthough the image of the brave man…still holds for the protagonists of the contemporary corridos, the meaning of bravery has changed…the tough guys of the narcocorridos carry their weaponry for personal enrichment and empowerment" as opposed to the causes of "social justice" and "equality" embraced by their

corrido forefathers (323). Indeed, "although at the margins of society, drug traffickers are far from being an exploited, suppressed, powerless subaltern group for whom musical expression functions as symbolic empowerment in its struggle for social betterment" (Simonett 316).

Narratives are now written by someone else at a high price according to specific details and guidelines fed to them. First-person used to perpetuate intimacy between singer and listener due to the shared details of life circumstances, but now hyperbolic declarations of wealth, prestige, adventure have fostered a "have" and "have not" dynamic. Finally, *prohibido* and proud as appropriated by the *movimiento alterado* demographic assumes the posture of an aggressive dare to challenge one's turf, kin, business, or the like at risk of suffering macabre and murderous consequences.

II. Proselytizing

The BuKnas de Culiacán (BuKnas) were spotlighted in the 2013 documentary *Narco Cultura,* a film of which offers a shockingly blatant, and at times exasperating, glimpse into a distressing trichotomy that has emerged out of the millennial *movimiento alterado* iteration of *narco corridos*: actualities, sensationalization, and moral dilemma.

The documentary splits time between following Richi Soto, a Crime Scene Investigator (CSI) for the Mexican forensic department SEMEFO (Servicio Médico Forense) in Juárez, Mexico, and Edgar Quintero, the lead singer of BuKnas, based in Los Angeles, U.S.A.[49] Juárez was selected as the location of interest to parallel an exploration of a millennial *narco corrido* artist such as Quintero due to the rapid increase in violence between 2007 and 2010 (precisely the

[49] SEMEFO is now the Instituto de Ciencias Forenses (INCIFO).

years during which *narco traficante* and cartel presence and activity rose in the region) and its long intertwined trans-border history with the U.S. Juárez, according to Soto, had become inundated by extortion, sweeping forfeiture of jobs, and a debilitating loss of innocence at the hands of cartel authority and activity. A certain sense of futility is unavoidable as the viewer becomes more entranced with Soto, his work, and the social conditions highlighted, all reflective of a *narco* centric cultural movement sect suggestive of *narco* once being an adjective but is now a bona fide noun synonymous with *mexicano* (or at least border town) culture (Kun 2012).

The viewers' first introduction to Edgar Quintero is in the midst of a commission request from "Ghost", a *corrido* client, in which he details the specifics of what he would like to hear (and not hear) in a personalized *narco corrido* (for example, that he carries a 9mm pistol). Quintero dutifully obliges by delivering the song in person and performing a few stanzas *a capella*, which Ghost proceeds to record on his cell phone (presumably to upload immediately after the meeting concludes, leveraging the social media instantaneous sharing phenomena that affords instant exposure for both Ghost, the "badass" street banger, and Quintero, the "talented" artist who delivers).The financial lure is made obvious immediately: Ghost offers payment in the form of a sizeable wad of $100 bills. Quintero, in one sense, possess the golden ticket of street cred so necessary after the era of Chalino: he spent some time in jail. While the documentary does not detail what his incarceration stint was for, it is still a factoid Quintero himself shares in several instances seemingly with the intention to emphasis how he "gets" it and is part of this "in" crowd.

Thus begins a deluge of scenes in which Quintero and/or his cohort glamorize the *narco* agenda and lifestyle despite living on the U.S. side of the border and, admittedly, having spent

very little time in Mexico. At one point, while driving with his manager and band mates (sharing a marijuana cigarette that he jokes hails from Mexico yet carries an American name to "gringo-fy" the product) Quintero flaunts a pistol he was gifted by a former *corrido* client. Guns of all shapes and size appear to be a permanent fixture in the imaginations of Quintero and the BuKnas in general, and appear frequently on album covers, as part of stage costumes, and other paraphernalia (t-shirts, etc.), an obvious influence from the days of Chalino who became notorious for carrying a gun tucked into his pants at all times.The prominent capitalization of the letter "K" in their name denotes a sideways AK-47, iconography originally associated with The Komander, another popular *movimiento alterado* artist.

More flagrant brandishing of *narco*-centric props is a main fixture of one particular show performed in El Paso, Texas during which bazookas are brought out on stage, and gunshot sound effects serve as song preludes. The jollity of the scene is sobering when honing on the garish lyrics that Quintero croons to a backdrop of a passionate and adoring crowd:

> With an Ak-47 and a bazooka on my shoulder,
> Cross my path and *I'll chop your head off,*
> *We're bloodthirsty, crazy, and we like to kill.*
> *We are the best at kidnapping*,
> Our gang always travels in a caravan
> With bulletproof vests *ready to execute*!
> (Schwarz 2013, emphasis mine)

In comparison to the previous *corrido* writing styles examined in section I, it easy to see how "humdrum" would be an apt word to describe "Contrabandista" in comparison to what the BuKnas have authored here. Absent is a tone of lamentation, and while there is a definite message of forewarning and preaching it is not one meant to keep fellow comrades out of trouble or to encourage them to learn from the singer's mistake(s). Rather, the message is riddled with

scare tactics meant to dissuade one from encroaching on any aspect of their physical, familial, or financial turf lest they have a death wish. “Contrabandista” was not a glorification of the *bandito* lifestyle while the above excerpt is that in spades, espousing power (AK-47 and a bazooka), physical strength (needed to chop off a head), moral liberation (bloodthirsty, crazy, and fondness for murder), comradery (traveling together in a caravan, never leaving one behind or alone), and invincibility (bulletproof vests). The smuggler character in “Contrabandista” feels badly for both having been caught and for the life that he misses out on a result, yet one could imagine this millennial smuggler protagonist being incapable of remorse and simply blazing his way out of confinement leaving a harrowing wake behind him.

Such a progression from relatively demure to more outspoken and confrontational echoes the narrative trends examined in the newspaper headlines of Chapter One and the literary examples of Chapter Two. While early headlines throughout the year 2000 spoke to a willingness to wait, negotiate, and a general optimism for improved migratory relations between the U.S. and Mexico, this had dramatically changed by 2015 when the tone became distinctly frustrated, disillusioned, and occasionally derisive. This progression from unassertive to forthright is also evident in the transformations undertaken by Julián (“Mariachi”), the narrator (“Amigos mexicanos”), and Nayeli (*Into the Beautiful North*).

Perhaps what is most awe inducing for the documentary viewer is the constant juxtaposition between the BuKnas world of pretend and the real world of CSI investigator Soto. As scenes fade of the bazooka bearing, gunshot rattled concert, the viewer is struck by the profound contrast afforded by the abrupt transition to the (real) blood spattered car windshield that had been riddled by (real) bullets back in Juárez. The continuous holding up of one versus

the other gradually results in the BuKnas becoming more and more farcical. Assertions by their fans, managing parties, or even themselves that what they do by providing a physical and emotive space for "regular people" to "go to a club" and "feel *narco* for that night" is in any way principled or exemplar emerges as a radically flawed interpretation of the fame they have acquired, the music they write, and the *narco* characters they perform as. The dichotomy achieved by Director Shaul Schwarz is perhaps most evident in these two scenes (the concert in El Paso and the early morning crime scene in Juárez) precisely because the all-too-real nature of the themes and actions that the BuKnas croon about become manifestly tangible, as do the suggested criticisms via imagery and editing in regard to their behavior and exploitative tendencies.

Still, justification towards *narco* and cartel *schadenfreude* abounds. Joel Vásquez, the promoter for the BuKnas' U.S.-based record label *Twiins*, offers a vehement rationalization that *narco* and violence-centric music and performance, particularly of the *movimiento alterado* niche, are uprightly fulfilling the public call to perpetuate a much-needed "anti-system rebellion" that actually makes a "hero out of somebody who operates outside of the [presumably corrupt and ineffective] law" (Schwarz 2013). This is a bold declaration that is perhaps enticing to the marginalized communities long overdue for representation and productive action, since it appears on the surface to ennoble and normalize the ability and willingness of *narco* bandits to "fight the man" (and each other if that is what circumstances and the "greater good" dictate).

The third aspect of the trichotomy examined by the *Narco Cultura* documentary is the moral dilemma afforded by commercial deception on behalf of groups like the BuKnas, and the omnipotent effect *movimiento alterado* appears to have had on the millennial socio-cultural

psyche of the northern Mexican and southern U.S. border regions. Deceptive is an apt term to apply to the BuKnas' *métier*, at least insofar as the film portrays it. Quintero himself has spent little time Culiacán, Sinaloa, or even Mexico. In terms of verbiage, a device of which would be crucial for a songwriter seeking transcultural and cross-border success, he acknowledges that he does not possess the same depth of words and slang as a local *sinaloense* or *mexicano*, and flippantly surmises that a "six-month vacation" on the other side of the border would perhaps do him and his career wonders for the "inspiration" it would afford.

An underlying sense of artificiality further emerges when Quintero and the BuKnas' extreme lack of proximity to the locale of which they intimately sing about, and the resulting dependence on second-hand information about transpiring events, is highlighted. Perhaps more startling than any other disclosure is that of the BuKnas' near total dependence on YouTube and *narco* centric blogs for the information crooned about in their lyrics. This is a reality that Quintero laments since "all Komander [and other Mexican-based *alterado* performative peers] has to do is walk outside", lending The Komander's (and the like) creative license more credibility, much greater ease, and more immediate access than Quintero.

The rationale for such Internet dependence is elaborated on by the BuKnas manager while he conducts a Google search and peruses the website "Blog del narco", their "go-to" site of choice, in search or song worthy news bytes:

> You can see people, like, with their guts coming out from their stomach, their heads blown off, all real things, you know? That's how we get ideas, that's how we make our songs, you know…This is all day, every day, every thirty minutes, you know, 24/7.

His defense of relying on the blog as a reputable source to access “real things” is curious since he himself has not and will not participate in any aspect of the reality that unfolds in the scenes he examines and the news he reads. He has no method to corroborate the information as being either remotely factual or radically hyperbolized “click bait”. Thus, reliance on Internet searches (an inherently secondary source) for story lines to write and sing about further distances the BuKnas from achieving the authenticity that they aspire towards since it emphasizes how much, in fact, they are *not* present as events transpire, and how much of an outsider they really are. This point is accidentally strengthened by Quintero himself when he asserts that “anything I write in my garage in L.A. is just bullshit” and “you have to experience the real thing to write about it”, a capability of which he and his band mates do not physically possess.

Following such revelations as to the BuKnas’ insecurities and compositional strategies, additional disingenuous tendencies are unintentionally divulged when the opportunity arises for the group to visit Mexico, a stimulating venture of which is anticipated to afford Quintero’s career and music with the vanguard inspiration so desired. As he explains, “It’s funny, BuKnas de Culiacán has the name Culiacán in it, but I’ve got to be honest, I really don’t know Culiacán”. Seeking primary source material and eyewitness inspiration is not the point of contention with such an admission. Rather, it is precisely such exaggerated *narco* posturing, lack of authenticity, and overall sense of staging during the trip’s duration that makes such a statement standout to the viewer. Quintero is not an eyewitness to anything more authentic than the BuKnas’ manager was able to plan and coordinate with on-site handlers and guides.

Immediately after reflecting on how distant he feels from Culiacán, the documentary cuts to a scene in which Quintero and the BuKnas’ manager records a cell phone video, presumably to

begin the social media fawning and pandering campaign to publicize their "genuine" visit to *la patria*. Standing in front of a black Ford F-150 truck while holding a bottle of beer and firing a handgun into the sky, they offer a bullet-filled tribute to the Culiacán *ranchito* behind them (also noteworthy is the constant presence of a pistol tucked into Quintero's pants, again reminiscent of Chalino's ornamental firearm legacy). This is highly illustrative of the BuKnas' ploy to leverage social mass media and calculated communicative strategies to "raise their own voice, to perform their own music, and, thus, to imagine and create their own [version of the] world", one in which they are rich, powerful, influential, and most importantly, all-Mexican and all-in for *la patria*. They do not need to assimilate into American music mainstream in order to achieve a meaningful identity or narrative but rather are able to become extremely successful "*because* of their Mexincanness" (or rather, for the BuKnas, their effective interpretation of the Mexican *narco* badboy/powerful player) (Simonett 319).

The cameraman makes sure to pan around so that the background landscape is clearly visible, most probably to authenticate their presence in the area. It is an effort to prove their "street" and *sinaloense* credibility yet is entirely staged which, for some, will once again only increase how disconnected the BuKnas actually are from the community they claim to hail from. Taken together, it becomes difficult to see *movimiento alterado* "as anything but a shrewd business decision, a carefully plotted attempt to cash in on Mexican drug violence…and to do so at a distance – from within the relative safety of the United States" (Kun 2012).

Staging the Rise and Fall

The conflict with reality that emerges as a result of the juxtaposed images of Soto in Juarez and Quintero in Los Angeles, as well as the premeditated and disingenuous methods with

which the BuKnas create and propagate their image and music, bring to mind a peculiar and unanticipated parallel with the eminent Robert Capa photo, "Muerte de un miliciano" ("Miliciano"). The well-known photograph supposedly captures the precise moment in which a young Republican soldier was shot in the hills of Espejo, Córdoba at the 1936 Battle of Cerro Muriano during the Spanish Civil War. It has come under significant scrutiny for intimations of being a hoax, the subject of which is the focus of the meticulous 2007 documentary *La sombra del iceberg (Sombra*). Three principal points of contention have emerged as the basis to question the photo's authenticity, the latter two of which are of interest for the discussion at hand: first, the existence of a second, almost identical photo, and the curious cinematic quality of the other six images in the photograph series taken that day, second, the lack of confirmation as to the real identity of the soldier captured in the photo, and third, a forensic consideration of the anti-natural posture and physical features of the soldier in the photograph image.

Controversy around the photograph first arose in 1975 after journalist D.D. Gallagher described how Capa had recounted to him that the photo was merely an "escenificación para la cámara", sparking an urgency to identify the soldier who was captured so regrettably meeting his demise. It was thought that providing a name would humanize the individual whose image had become so revered and put an end to what Capa biographers and defenders Michel Lefebure and Richard Whelan labeled as inappropriate and intrusive "polémicas" that were belittling the image as nothing more than a cinematographic ploy. The soldier was revealed to be Frederico Borrell García, a young *alcoyano* militiaman, but questions remained how exactly it was that his identity discovered and confirmed.Doménech and Riebenbauer explain that confirmation was primarily achieved through simple familial recognition. Borrell's aunt, Empar Borrell, was shown the

photo in 1995 by Mario Brotóns, an *alcoyano* historian, and remembers how her mother had recognized the soldier as her brother-in-law. The resemblance was strong, and according to Empar, “nos causó un gran impacto…y de ahí vinieron todas las televisiones”. Later, the magazine *Interviú* perpetuated confirmation that the “Miliciano” had at long last been identified.

Brotóns subsequently published the book *Retazos de una época de inquietudes* in 1995 in which he put “Miliciano” front and center on the cover. At the last minute, before publication and unbeknownst to the surviving Borrell family, he added a page declaring that the photo had captured the sole victim of the battle at Cerro Muriano. He defended his assertions by assuring that he had sought confirmation from the Salamanca archives perhaps in an effort to put to rest already existing, as well as potentially more, suspicion. Brotóns effectively declared that the photo, scene, and person had made momentous contributions to the course of history and should therefore no longer be subject to puerile, sullying speculation. He died a mere two months later not knowing that his avowals had taken center stage as “la verdad oficial”.

Yet, Doménech and Riebenbauer uncovered two damning pieces of evidence during the investigative process for *Sombra* that place doubt on the quality Brotóns research: first, that he had in fact never visited the Civil War archives in Salamanca, and second, that there were other causalities at the Battle of Cerro Muriano. Still, defenders of Capa and “Miliciano” would continue to aggressively posture that such anecdotes should not and do not invalidate the many artistic, social, and political contributions that the photo made within Spain during the late 1930s, and internationally throughout the twentieth century.

“Intuición personal” is not sufficient enough of a device to guarantee absolute authenticity of a historical emblem of such importance and breadth, yet neither does evidence of

fabrication do much to deter lionization of Capa as an artist or the photo as an icon. At the risk of producing a documentary that consisted of nothing more than a mere "he-said-she-said" speculative impasse, Doménech and Riebenbauer sought assistance from a score of experts to engage in a meticulously exhaustive forensic examination of the photograph according to the following angles: anatomical, astrophysical/mathematical, geological/topographical, and photographical.

To begin with the first, Fernando Verdú of the *Departamento de Medicina Legal y Forense de la Universidad de Valencia* is of the opinion that the soldier could have certainly been alive at the moment the photo was taken due to the manner in which he is falling, which he describes as "anti-natural" (or, not as one would expect an individual to fall at the moment of death). He continues to explain how "sólo podría haberse producido tal y como aparece en la imagen si…le hubieran disparado con un arma de gran calibre, equivalente a una Magnum", not a weapon of choice during this particular conflict. Additionally, if the solider had been shot with such a high-caliber firearm, an impact site would have been visible in the photo. Verdú notes that there is no blood, no explosion of chest due to bullet impact, and his body is not "relaxed" as has often been observed by forensic anthropologists to be the case to occur when one suffers a sudden fatal blow. Taken together, Verdú is of the opinion that there is no evidence of "reasonable death".

His forensic consideration of the corporeal also extends to what might be at first glance several relatively innocuous physical traits. When comparing other images of Borrell against the soldier in the photograph they emerge as extremely telling. Verdú takes care to highlight discrepancies such as teeth (a gap in one, no gap in the other), lips (the angle at which the mouth

turns upwards), ears (proximity to head and shape of lobes), hands, and fingers (one set being bulkier than the other), further concluding with a "moral certainty" that the man in the photo is not Federico Borrell.

The second approach homes in on an astrophysical and mathematical perspective. Enric Marco, also from the University of Valencia, determines that Capa would have had to capture the photo at around nine o'clock in the morning (when a battle had not yet taken place) as opposed to the 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon time stated in Capa's official testament as to how events transpired that day. By calculating the position of the falling soldier's shadow in conjunction with variations between 1936 and 2006 of the sun's placement, he determines beyond question that a time of 9:00am in 1936 would have been the only possible hour to produce the posterior shadow in the manner that it appears in the photograph.

For the third point of query, land surveyor Manuel Illanes considers from a geological and topographical perspective the three principal sites that have emerged as the potential "official" photo locale: Cerro Muriano (long considered as the site), Virgen de los Pinares (identified by a group of Japanese journalists due to similarities in landscaping), and Cerro de la Coja (located approximately thirty kilometers south of Cerro Muriano). Illanes confirms that the latter is the most probable due to the nearly identical slope in the hillside as well as mountain range in the background; there was no battle at Cerro de la Coja on September 5, 1936.

The fourth and final point is assessed by Basilio Martín Patino, recipient of the 2005 Premio Nacional de Cinematografía. As a film director, Patino's work has traditionally probed the debate in regard to truth and reality versus pretense and mockery in works of fiction. His contribution illuminates cinematographic techniques of which he himself used to recreate the

setting when contracted for a 1979 television advertisement to commemorate and publicize the work of historian Hugh Thomas about the Spanish Civil War. Though complementary of Capa's work and person, Patino insinuates that staging such a scene would absolutely be possible since he himself replicated it almost exactly for the sake of his commercial.

Capa and the BuKnas: Friends in Fakery?

To round out the examination of the four components examined as part of the authenticity dispute towards "Miliciano", photographer Josep Monzó and Marco (astrophysicist) replicate the precise corporeal conditions of the photo, including the twenty-meter distance claimed by Capa and the precise type of camera and film used. The question arises as to whether or not his was the camera used to snap the picture, but Monzó is quick to state that the "how" is not as important as the "why" and the "for what" a picture is captured.

This statement hearkens back to a similar declaration earlier in the *Sombra* documentary made by a Capa defender: "una buena foto es una buena foto, no veo por dónde está el problema". The "problem" lies in the real-life, concrete actions taken by others who are inspired by an image, or in the case of the BuKnas, a song, that visually or lyrically communicate either a radically hyperbolized truth, or a complete fabrication. In the case of "Miliciano", the spectator is relying solely on an image of one particular moment and it is left to their imagination to fill in context. Being left to one's own imaginative devices, particularly in a moment of fear, uncertainty, and violence such as a civil war, would doubtless trend towards a more macabre and reactionary interpretation.

Differently, though no less provoking, the BuKnas are able to fire a visual and oral barrage towards spectators, resulting in the opposite: an over-abundance for the spectator in terms

of “information” with which they are able to negotiate and build context. In the latter scenario, such sensory surplus still pushes a macabre and reactionary interpretation since one is not conceded time or space to consider less cadaverous alternatives in the midst of such intense stupor.

During the investigative process for this project I was confronted with several complex questions in regard to the notion of socio-artistic responsibility, particularly during periods of conflict in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Do Capa and the BuKnas simply re-stage reality, or are they injecting a dangerous component of disingenuousness? Are Capa and the BuKnas propagating an edited or a hyperbolized perspective? Are the “Milicano” photo and the BuKnas catalog of *narco corridos* catalyst or product?

In the case of Capa, the “Miliciano” photo became an image used to recruit *republicano* fighters to the Loyalist cause, as well as bolster a sense of sympathy and mourning for the losses being suffered as Loyalist, anti-Franco and Falangist efforts mounted. How many impressionable youths were motivated by the manipulated imagery to rally behind the cause? How many of those youths subsequently lost their lives having been inspired by an image that potentially never even happened?

Similarly, do *narco corridos* of the *movimiento alterado* genre stimulate actual action on behalf of twenty-first century Mexican nationals and immigrants in the border region who this time are not necessarily shocked into aligning with the legion of anti-system, pro-*narco* via narrations of casualty or mortality, but are so desensitized to them that engaging with death has become the only reliable avenue to achieve control and advancement? Sandra Rodriguez, as

interviewed by Schwarz in *Narco Cultura* expounds on this question with the following observation:

> We [Mexicans] have no idea how deep this is in our minds and culture. For me, it's like a symptom of how defeated we are as a society. The kids learn to look like *narcos*. What I think, is because they represent an idea of success and power and impunity and limitless power, if you can kill a person that is limitless power.

In both instances, "Miliciano" and the BuKnas' *narco corrido* repertoire and *narco* centric façade, there are three socially and culturally damaging by-products: a muddling of reality, an impetus for others to engage in real-life action with real-life consequence, and a contribution to the creation of a generation of mislead youth who make decisions to act based on hyperbole, fakery, and/or fabrication. A consideration of the ethics involved with such sensationalizing of death, murder, war, and cartels is essential in suggesting that *narco corridos* have morphed into a type of "necro" *corrido* for the manner in which they both normalize the culture of death and violence and serve as an intoxicant in the psyche of listeners towards more extreme behavioral norms (Kun 2012, Madrid, 77 2009). Bob Ostertag discusses modern-day commodity creation cycle as impacted by inundations of suffering-centric socio-politically pertinent content, an approach of which is applicable to the case of *narco corridos* and the *movimiento alterado* music of millennial Mexico, and to the consideration of what socio-cultural direction they are pushing the "scene" and overall socio-cultural "health" towards.

The impact that the BuKnas' posturing and songs (and those of their *movimiento alterado* musical peers) have had and will continue to have as long as a forum and social network connectivity are provided on the "mass consciousness" of the northern Mexican/southern U.S.

border region youth are significant. Framing these players (musician, consumer, cartel) as primary influencers of a type of decline on behalf of the ability for cultural participants *not* associated with this musical genre (as either performers, consumers, or cartel objectors) is intriguing since it underscores an "infective sensibility" and "thought malaise" resultant via constant and routine exposure.[50]

Assertions that "[t]he danger they [cartels and/or propagators of their lifestyle] represent equals our [other cultural participants] own failure to be dangerous" could be interpreted as either a failure to know how to counter the pervasiveness of something as elusive as music, or as a failure to develop a "product" or undertaking that is equally as attractive and engaging towards the same community demographics that the BuKnas target. The cumulative result is the "new tragic narrative" of which he speaks; tragic for the actual, tangible loss and fear suffered, and/or for the permeation of severely adversity-minded themes.

Still, failure implies potential for reorganization. Ostertag frames this possibility, no matter how remote, as the emergence of political art; a coalescence of a time and place of "extraordinary political [or cultural] ferment" (6). He has observed two possible directions for the "mass consciousness" to veer towards during moments of such fermentation: on the one hand, "accumulations of social pressures result in…eruptions…that even those with little affinity for political action drop their daily routine and take extraordinary risks", or on the other, that

[50] Even Richi Soto, the Crime Scene Investigator is not immune to the "everyday" presence of *narco corridos* in Juarez. While attending a family birthday party, an ensemble sings the lyrics *I kill at a very young age/That's why I live so traumatized/Then to get over the trauma/I go get into a fight/Now nobody can catch me/They say he has flown away/With his AK-47 at his side* while party-goers enthusiastically sing along and dance with friends and relatives as young as children and as old as grandparents.

"generalized complacency" or effort undertaken to "right an injustice that others see as remote" (or exceedingly unlikely to change) can actually have an isolating effect from one's own culture for which action is being encouraged (Ostertag 6-7).

This is a clash that Ostertag aptly labels as being a "catch-22". The decision process to trend towards one versus the other hinges on a perception of musical composition and propagation as being not merely a banal or parenthetical creative endeavor, but rather more fundamentally understanding it as a shrewder question of targeted intention. This is at the heart of this examination of the BuKnas and other millennial *narco corrido* composers and performers, as well as for conjecture as to what variant lies beyond the current *movimiento alterado* rendition.

Ostertag encourages consumers, spectators, and activists to be aware of an applicable spectrum of intention, one that is broad yet still able to be honed specifically to millennial *narco* musical composition and diffusion. On one end prevails the "abstract" in which "cultural references are relatively open-ended, or at least implicit and unspecified", while on the other, far opposite end "lies deeply personal work about the experiences of one's own life, family, tribe, and so forth" (Ostertag 9). This spectrum is evident in the manner in which the *narco corrido* genre has morphed along the timeline examined in this project: with *El Contrabandista (*1930s*)* on the more "abstract" end, *Contrabanda y traición* and the Tigres *(*1970s*), Corridos prohibidos (*1980s*),* Chalino (1990s) moving steadily along to becoming increasingly personal (and confrontational), and concluding with the BuKnas (2000s) on the complete opposite end of the spectrum in which little is left to the imagination.

III. Imagining the Next Narco Narrative

It remains to be seen what lies beyond the current *movimiento alterado* variety of *narco corrido*. Nevertheless, other millennial performers such as Gerardo Ortiz appear to be emerging within a fresh niche of the genre, one that is perhaps more reflective and not inclined towards glorification of the macabre. Coined by Ostertag, the term "social noise" of art appears to be apt when considering Ortiz and the unique direction that his songs have taken since a pivotal moment in 2011 permanently impacted his personal and professional trajectory: while leaving a concert in Colima, his truck was gunned down by a barrage of bullets that killed the driver and Ortiz's manager, and very nearly ended his life as well (Kun 2012). A declared motive for the attack remains unknown, though ample speculation abounds that Ortiz's musical alignment and support for the Sinaloa Cartel served as the catalyst.[51] Violence against *narco* musicians has been more commonplace in the millennium than one would expect. While targeted kidnappings, decapitations, etc. against journalists and others associated with the world of print media and news reporting were widely reported on and condemned, between 2006 and 2010 thirty *narco* singers or associates were murdered.

The impact of the attack on Ortiz was obvious on the album he released afterwards, "Entre Dios y el Diablo". Breaking from prior compositional norms in which Ortiz had previously played the roles of "vicious cartel henchman", proud and brutal torturer, and Sinaloa Cartel security accomplice, much of this album offers a profound (by comparison) reflection on death, violence, and the impact it has on culture, society, and ones' self (Kun 2012). It is a return to the lamentation seen in "Contrabandista" back in 1934. While our smuggler protagonist then is

[51] Ortiz was raised in Sinaloa. On the hit album "Ni Hoy Ni Mañana" Ortiz appears in the song "Líder del Genocidio" as a member of *El Antrax*, "the vicious security team of Sinaloa cartel boss El Mayo Zambada" (Kun 2012).

repentant from jail, Ortiz appears to be so from the grave. The former proselytizes from an "elder" stance (having lived and learned) while Ortiz, being dead in the song, is able to emit more of a saint-like posture (positioning himself as reverent and holy and encouraging one to learn from his mistakes for being departed). The effect is one of surprising introspection, a reaction of which corresponds with what Ostertag would term as an inevitable and reactionary repugnance to the overwhelming "social noise" that the *narco* music scene was perpetuating (9).

This notion is curious when applied to the millennial *narco* musical phenomenon: do these *narco músicos* impose, succumb to, react to, or perpetuate the noise? It would appear in the case of Ortiz that he seized the invitation afforded by his near-death encounter to react by isolating himself in order to break from the mold and re-emerge as a steward of a new musical interpretation and lyrical commentary. This is perhaps most evident in the song "Cara A La Muerte" in which Ortiz makes his biggest, and perhaps most important to date, alteration of the *movimiento alterado* style: he "switches from one side of the AK-47 to the other, narrating from inside of a coffin while lamenting the damages and wounds of his life" (Kun 2012). He yearns for the chance to be re-born into a new life where there is "no más sangre" and a collective sense of "ya basta", the closest that "any [millennial] *narco corrido* has come to joining the protesters and the poets and the bereaved thousands" (Kun 2012) in expressing communal fatigue and satiation with the BuKnas (and others) style of posturing, pandering, propagating that perpetuates a *narco* centric existence as preeminent.

IV. Conclusions

The question arises when examining the trajectory of *narco corridos* as to whether the *movimiento alterado* iteration represents development or degeneration. The differences in lyrical

and behavioral styles, and the reaction and consumption on behalf of the public, suggest a socio-cultural need to reinterpret what had been long existing narratives, similar to what was seen with newspaper headlines and literature. Music aids in this process of renegotiation, even when it veers towards nihilism and the macabre, because of its capacity to function as a "strategic site for production and negotiation" within in an overall environment of "contemporary economic and political marginalization" (Hugo Viesca 726).

There are aspects of history repeating itself through each iteration of *narco corrido* examined here, yet also evolution. "Contrabandista" offered lamentation and counsel while The Tigres became more edgy and aggressive. Chalino lent a further notch of bellicose authenticity while the BuKnas appear to exhibit a peak with their particularly sinister and dark brand of composition and performance. Ortiz appears to hint at the lyrical and behavioral pendulum swinging back towards a type of reflection on what one's actions might incur, which, while not quite representative of a return to modesty, is certainly more toned down than the proclamations of his *alterado* peers.

Some might claim that Ortiz's "come to Jesus" repertoire diverges from the track towards non-compromising social, political, and cultured vocality evident in the newspaper headlines of Chapter One and the literature of Chapter Two. On the other hand, is his rejection of mainstream *narconomics,* and everything held therein, a type of ultimate self-realization; an ultimate re-casting of a narrative. I will examine an additional strategic site used for conscious and collective (re)negotiation in Chapter Four as the focus switches from the aural to the visual: cartoons and comics.

Chapter Four

Political Cartoons as Visual Forms of Re-Casted Millennial Narratives

Fig. 11. *Day of the Dead in Manhatitlan* by Felipe Galindo.

I selected political comics and cartoons as an additional textual tool to be examined in the pursuit of identifying the recasting of *mexicano* narratives via a millennial gaze due to their strong affixation to micro-level popular culture and dialogue. Their socio-cultural reach is arguably superior to the newspaper headlines of Chapter One or the literary content of Chapter Two since they are epigrammatic and visually inviting, capable of a quick glance and comprehension as opposed to the perceived time or energy commitment that reading a lengthier written discourse (such as an editorial, short story, or novel) might require. Plus, as David Keane points out, cartoonists enjoy a greater "latitude" than perhaps other genres of cultural products to "attack established ideas"; the "cartoonist can say and do things…[that others] cannot say or do" (847). For cartoonists and their publishers, political cartoons are an 'ideal medium for suggesting what cannot be said by the [mere] printed word" (Milton Kennitz, quoted in Keane 847). The

quick and easily digestible graphics combined with short spurts of sequential multi-scene narrative more closely relate to the passivity with which the *narco corridos* discussed in Chapter Three might be enjoyed.

It became obvious early on during the investigation for this project that a definition for what is considered to be a "cartoon" (or rather, if and where political cartoons fit in within the broader world of visual art) is difficult at best to pin down. This is due to the disagreement in opinion between scholars such as Robert Harvey and Aaron Meskin, who both question the need to define the genre at all and systematically dismantle what are perhaps the four most recent and recognized attempts to define cartoons, and Hilary Chute, who while in agreement with Meskin that aspects of current definitions are problematic, still makes the case that they certainly occupy a viable place within the world of graphic and visual artistry. Chute goes as far as making the case that comics facilitate a unique type of graphic and visual pictorial narrative, a stance of which the political cartoons discussed in this chapter supports.

It is to Meskin we turn to first due to the voracity with which he undoes the work of Greg Hayman and John Henry Pratt, David Kunzle, Will Eisner, and most notably Scott McCloud in order to make the case that their definitions of comics and cartoons are unacceptably and bewilderingly "untenable" (370). Beginning with Kunzle, who defines comics as image sequences with preponderance of image versus text that offer a story that is both "moral and topical", Meskin finds two problems: first, why could a comic not be both "one-off" and successful (meaning, why the fixation with multi-part series), and second, it places far too much stock on the notion that the "audience comprehension of the narrative depends *primarily* on a grasp of the sequence of the images rather than the text" (369). The component of Kunzle's

definition that touches on a cartoon's "narrative condition" necessitating a moral and topical angle is intriguing when considered against the Mexican-based political cartoons that will be examined in section II. Suffice to say for now that Meskin views such narrative stipulations as implausible (and indeed, he is of the opinion that no "narrative condition" is conceivable for a comic (370).

Eisner takes Kunzle's notion of visual sequencing as fundamental to a comic further by labeling them as a distinctive form of "sequential art" (Meskin 370). This is quickly brushed aside as being much "too thin" a definition, since it makes no attempt to "distinguish comics from animation, or for that matter, from any other sequentially ordered examples of art" (Meskin 370), a well taken point. Additionally, by making the case that they are "among those media-like film and photography – that can…also be used nonartistically", Meskin rejects Eisner's conjecture that comics are art (370). Hayman and Pratt follow the tradition of Kunzle and Eisner characterizing comics as pictorial and sequential, yet Meskin is still bothered by the lack of consideration towards the conundrum that such a definition creates, since it leaves out "single-panel works" that are indeed commonly considered comics (370).[52] It is curious to consider how a pro-sequential condition defender might negate the stance that single panel cartoon images are comics too, yet therein lies a fundamental reason why the one aspect of this definition exploration is not contested, that of the difference between comics and cartoons.

Comics are defined as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence" often bound together in a magazine fashion (McCloud 9). Cartoons differ in that they are "single panel" one frame self-standing bits of "visual vocabulary" (McCloud 20). They still employ

[52] Meskin offers the example of the popular American comic "Family Circus" to make this point.

juxtaposition of words and pictures but do so by leveraging one single frame as opposed to a sequence. Thus, while related, the two terms are not interchangeable, even though both mediums put visuals and text in play with one another "to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud 9). In this chapter, the term *comic* is initially used more frequently to highlight the prevalence of that particular medium in the early advent of micro-image and micro-narrative creation in Mexico. *Cartoon* is more deeply explored later as the majority of examples selected consist of the single-panel style.

Perhaps most surprising was to review Meskin's umbrage with McCloud, one of the pivotal contributors to the field of comic/cartoon academics. Essentially, Meskin accuses McCloud of being far too ahistorical which results in the shortcoming of being too inclusive on the one hand while too limiting on the other. Harvey also contends with McCloud, though more specifically the idea proposed by McCloud that comics do not need words since it is precisely their inclusion that differentiate comics from other forms of pictorial art (Chute 454).

Beyond the contestations of what acceptably comprises a comic visually (sequence versus single-panel), more of interest here are the contestations of the narrative aspects of comics and cartoons. Hayman and Pratt have long considered narratives to be an "essential component", but Meskin wonders why. Is this purely due to a desire to differentiate comics from other forms of sequential/single-panel juxtaposed images? Or is it to emphasize how comics are not "low brow" cultural products but rather consist of a vibrant and socio-politically illuminative purpose?

Chute makes the case for reading comics as a form of graphic literature, a stance of which the investigative results of this Chapter align with. While she states a similar opinion to Meskin that confusion abounds in terms of a universal definition, she essentially proposes that efforts to

define the comic genre must continue since it is these particular cultural products that carry and depict a “unique cultural baggage” (452). Such efforts should go “beyond pre-established rubrics: we have to reexamine the categories of fiction, narrative, ahistoricity” in order to be able to include comics in our literary examinations and more broadly to grasp the attempts at narrative re-casting and re-negotiation that are taking place in millennial Mexico (452). Thus, Chute accepts comics as a bona fide medium, “not as a lowbrow genre, which is how its usually understood” despite comic-centric and comic-curious research “gaining traction in the humanities” (452).

Particularly intriguing about Chute’s stance is her defense of the relationship between the success of a comic’s form and temporality. This is in direct agreement with McCloud, who explains that a comic has the ability to “fracture both time and space, offering a jagged staccato rhythm of unconnected moments”, moments which “alternate on the page with blank space” (Chute 455). In other words,

> [a] comic’s page offers a rich temporal map configured as much by what isn’t drawn as by what is: it is highly conscious of the artificiality of its selective borders, which diagram the page into an arrangement of encapsulated moments. McCloud alleges that the empty space, called the gutter, ‘plays host’ to what is ‘at the very heart of comics’ and that ‘what’s between the panels is the only element of comics that is not duplicated by any other medium (McCloud, as quoted in Chute 455).

Intriguing is the notion of borders and selectivity. While McCloud and Chute most certainly refer to the borders of comic panels, one could extrapolate visual and textual manipulations of the

presence/lack of, definitions of, defense of, exploration of, dialogue with, and behavior towards borders in a comic and/or cartoon as being a way in which U.S.-Mexican Border themes are re-casted and re-negotiated. The picture, the word(s), or the lack of either or both at selected moments are a meaningful act taken by the cartoonist, perhaps even an act of resistance or defiance. As Chute explains, "the presence of the body, through the hand, as a marker on the text lends a subjective register to the narrative surfaces of comic pages that further enables comics works to be productively self-aware in how they 'materialize' history" (457).

Chute briefly touches on the domination of oppositionality in the comics produced in the 1960s. While she is referring to comics produced in the U.S., the comics examined in section II demonstrate a palpable sense of internal (Mexican) and external (United States) oppositionality in millennial Mexican comics. This hearkens to the "fed up" sentiment seen in the headlines of Chapter One, the literature of Chapter Two, and the *narco corridos* of Chapter Three. There is a parallel to be drawn with the latter, particularly in regard to the extreme *narco corridos* of the *movimiento alterado*: experimental underground comics. Both touch a nerve and gather a following in a similar manner. Perhaps their shared appeal can be boiled down to the way they "translate and transvalue an anti-narrative avant-garde aesthetic for the popular and populist" (Chute 456). Such comics, like *alterado corridos*, lend themselves to fostering a "level of self-reflexivity" both for the reader and the cartoonist (Chute 457).

David Keane further corroborates this stance by emphasizing how humor (i.e., political cartoons) is a particularly apt barometer of social attitudes, and how important comics have been to understanding the ebbs and flows of history (849). What he means is that one must never consider a comic to be limited to mere commentary on the week's main topic/news but rather as a

tool for "future generations" to situate the contemporary within the past (849). In fact, the historicity and social gage components of comics are recognized by the UN who actually held a seminar called "Cartooning for Peace: The Responsibility of Political Cartoonists" in October 2006. Even then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan recognized a comic or cartoon's uniqueness and "special role in forming public opinion" (Keane 849). As he said at the first seminar,

> few things can hurt you more directly than a caricature of yourself, a group you belong to, or – perhaps worst – of a person you deeply respect…cartoons can offend, and that is part of their point…[cartoonists] should use their influence, not to reinforce stereotypes or inflame passions, but to promote peace and understanding" (Keane 874).

Returning to the notion of borders, Chute and McCloud share the vital observation that both cartoons and comics "explore the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be down at the intersection of collective histories and life stories (Chute 459). They do not shy away from or justify trauma but rather recast it through a "visual retracing" that is cathartic and enabling. The angle of femininity and feminism explored in Chapter Two is accessible yet again within the medium of comics and directly connects with the idea of visual and figuratively manipulated boundaries. Female comic book writers and artists such as Natacha Bustos, Alana Macías, and Stephanie Rodríguez exemplify the "rich range of work by women writers [and illustrators] who investigate childhood and the body [and the millennial Latino/a experience] – concerns typically relegated to the silence and invisibility of the private sphere" (Chute 459). Bustos, a member of the Colectiva de Autora de Comics,[53] tackles issues of Afro-Latinidad in her

[53] http://asociacionautoras.blogspot.com.es/p/sobre-la-asociacion.html

work, *Moongirl and Devil Dinosaur* while Macías's work titled *Zero Libertad* is notable for its choice of protagonist, "Zero", who is described as one of the few (if not only) "badass Latina super heroine" figures visible on the comic market (Gompf). Rodríguez also draws inspiration from her own life experiences as evident in, "No te hagas la pendeja", in which she describes childhood with a strict Latina mother, and the more somber, "Comics for Choice", a project in partnership with a Venezuelan woman who underwent an abortion. Chute summarizes how each of these female comic writers and illustrators make vital contributions to recasting and reframing narratives:

> [G]raphic narratives can envision an everyday reality of women's lives, which, while rooted in the personal, is invested and threaded with collectivity…graphic narrative presents a traumatic side of history [or the present], but…refuse to show it through the lens of unspeakability of invisibility, instead registering its difficulty through inventive (and various) textual practice (459).

The discussion about re-casted and re-imagined narratives in the millennium by Mexican millennials continues in the sections to follow. Political cartoons and comics drawn by artist Paco Calderón between 2000-2015 will be the subject of examination in this Chapter.Calderón draws for *El Norte, Reforma*, and *Mural*, the three periodicals previously examined in Chapter One.

I. Codices to Comics

Origins of pointedly engineering narratives via graphics in Mexico are identifiable as far back as pre-Columbian times. One merely has to consider the ubiquity of codices in Aztec culture to understand why the first colonizers would have leveraged the popularity of printed images in their efforts to evangelize and to spread Catholicism through New Spain. Such origins underscore

how it is then that millennial iterations of popular journalistic graphics in Mexican print outlets, such as political cartoons, can be said to have "always" had a highly visible place in the socio-cultural sphere and "always" have been influential since early on in artistic duplicative ability (Peláez 2010).

Beyond the eras of pre-conquest, evangelization, and colonization, the popularity and strategic creation involved with Mexican comics and cartoons emerged in the nineteenth century when, according to editorial cartoonist and scholar Rafael "El Fisgón" Barajas, "its birth and evolution were tied to the struggle between conservatives and liberals and the defense of freedom of thought" (81). It is from this point that Mexican comics and cartoons can be divided into four principal periods: 1874-1919, when "combative journalism developed and flourished", 1919-1934, when comic styles were "heavily influenced by Europe [and other outside] rising urban centers", 1934-1950, when the "works of national authors recapture[d] the interest of the public", and 1950-today (Peláez 206-209). It is noteworthy that when examining these four time periods it is initially nothing to do with stylistics that peak interest, but rather the background factors of production, distribution, and policing that emerge as crucial to the examination of todays millennially produced political cartoons. The latter two periods, 1934-1950 and 1950-today are of particular interest for the investigative endeavors of this Chapter.

As early as the 1920s, significant ideological clashes and propaganda campaigns spread quickly to the press. What began as mere translations of popular American comic strips morphed into a forum within which *lo local* could pridefully be put on exhibition in weekly *dominicales* (Sunday funnies) that became feature staples of Mexican periodicals. As Barajas and Auerbach best explain:

> Their primary goal was to attract readership, and gripping headlines and a panoply of illustrations and photographs were all part of their ammunition…it was in the 1920s that the daily cartoon became a firmly rooted custom throughout the country. These editorial cartoons soon became the most sought-after feature for readers…[f]rom this decade onward, all the major Mexican dailies would publish one, two, or even more graphic pieces (87).

One newspaper even promoted a yearly contest for "amateur cartoonists" to publish their renditions of *mexicanidad*, advertising with a stated "preference for comics about the national project" (Rubenstein 17). Such ingeniuty is what made this particular period of interest so vital in the emergence of a cartoon/comic-based mode of expression (and protest), and solidified the notion of a "nationalistic art movement" taking place within the twentieth century Mexican cultural sphere. It also represented the "commitment by many to the ideal of a socially and politically engaged art" that was easily obtainable, consumable, and shareable by the masses (Barajas and Auerbach 101).[54]

Flash forward to 1934 and the first Mexican comic book was published, coinciding with a massive nationwide campaign to increase and improve literacy.[55] To stoke interest among targeted demographics, the campaign framed reading as being "a gateway to modern life" and among the most "patriotic" of acts that one could engage in (Rubenstein 16). To read was "an act that reaffirmed a consumer's connection to the nation as it asserted his or her participation in an

[54] Such features are very similar to the memes discussed in Chapter Five.
[55] "In 1930, the census recorded a literacy rate of about 33 percent among Mexicans older than six. That number had climbed to 42 percent by 1940; by 1950, it reached 56 percent" (Rubenstein 14).

activity that the government had carefully and extensively marketed as revolutionary", in perfect alliance with the building of a post-revolution unified Mexican cultural personality (Rubenstein 16).

Comic strips and books took center stage for the ease and portability with which they could be consumed. In these early days, comic illustrators and publishers had considerable freedom to experiment with this particular graphic form, and so explored narrative and marketing strategies to tap into the perfect commercial formula. Similar to the discussion in Chapter Three of propagating *narco corridos*, publishers hit the jackpot when they discovered that comics best "worked by persuading consumers that there was little or no distinction among the readers, creators, and characters" (Rubenstein 13). Numerous strategies were utilized - - "variety, familiarity, sentimentality – including an appeal to patriotic feelings – and above all, the identification of the reader with the creator - - all of which still hails true today (Rubenstein 19).[56] Comics, like *narco corridos*, recounted the lives and details of resident characters in as stimulating, and at times brutal, a manner as "a loose interpretations of the facts" would permit (Rubenstein 138).

Just like Chalino and the BuKnas made their name by accepting commissions to write hyperbolic commemorative songs of *narcos*, *valientes*, and murderous, flamboyant escapades, stars of the time "all had comic books based on their lives" in which "their accomplishments took a backseat to their love lives and the crimes or battles they had witnessed" (Rubenstein 137). Calculated lackadaisical attitude is another similarity between comic and *narco corrido* mediums,

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[56] 1930-1945 represents a fifteen-year period of "wild expansion" that solidified "everything that *historietas* [comic books] are" today (Rubenstein 19).

most evident in comparing the creative methods of Chalino and Rius, whose comic art won such appeal among consumers in the first half of the twentieth century precisely because he convinced them that he was just as much an "average Joe" as they were and included such narrative and graphical constructions as slang and identifiable physical and material features in his work. Places too were leveraged in the same way the BuKnas market a (misleading) connection to Sinaloa: comic illustrators and publishers would knowingly select recognizable locales and prominent public personas to underscore the patriotism of their comic narratives, drawing from a "collective national imagination" (Barajas and Auerbach 89).

Consumers whole-heartedly bought into the idea that by purchasing and reading comics they were intimately involved with the communal and tangible nation and self-building project. Important to the effectiveness of this communality was how encouragement to purchase comics, and the pride in doing so, was not only a patriotic act on a national scale, but also one in total "solidarity with all other Mexicans reading them", introducing a type of individual peer-to-peer collegiality (Rubenstein 31). Comics were the "effective means" needed to "disseminate ideology and propaganda" in a non-threatening, almost stealthy way (one in which subconsciously perhaps instigated a process of rethinking on behalf of the masses about how news, opinion, etc. were consumed) (Barajas and Auerbach 86).

It was only a matter of time before opponents to this pictorial medium should emerge. The first of three notable censorship campaigns began in 1942 with rhetoric that lambasted comics as being harmful to the nation through their sin-infested "counterrevolutionary brainwashing" content (Rubenstein 45). Specific social domains considered to be most at risk were women (feminism/untoward behavior) and children (corrupting of the mind/loss of

innocence), though peripherally men as well since their behavior could be so easily influenced by the visual suggestiveness of loose women, gun-slinging, foul language, etc.

While this was a reasonably predictable case for conservatives to make, the bigger issue against comics can be boiled down to a type of "anti-cultural-imperialist perspective" harbored by pro-censorship campaigners (Rubenstein 45). Theirs was a stance that demanded simultaneous protection and resistance to U.S. capitalism and imperialism that comic books opened the door for. In other words, translation, distribution, or mimicking of popular American comic content and style posed an unacceptable threat, a belief reflected in the assertion that "Mexican's are masters of our own culture" and have no need, or desire, for insulting non-*mexicano* commodities imported from elsewhere (de Pallares, quoted in Rubenstein 49).

Even despite the 1944 institution of the *Comisión Calificadora de Publicaciones y Revistas Ilustradas* in response to conservative outcry, an organization charged with the monitoring of Mexican periodicals for a variety of indecencies, the anti-censorship (pro-comic) stance proliferated, a solidification of which is best summarized by Rubenstein:

> In response [to censorship efforts], comic books relied increasingly on devices such as running patriotic essay contests, printing photographs of editors and publishers at the side of important government figures, drawing patriotic stories of the safely distant past, and putting nationalist slogans in the mouths of popular [Mexican] cartoon characters (31).

Illustrators and publishers aggressively maintained that theirs were wholly constructive contributions to Mexican life due to their scholasticism and sanctimoniousness. If that was not sufficient to deter anti-comic campaigners, those under "attack" from conservative diatribe

cleverly questioned the patriotism of adversaries who, through their censor-focused rhetoric, were attempting to obstruct the devoted nation-building work of Mexican artists.

At first glance, it might appear that the *Comisión* was endeavoring to oppress free speech and creativity, yet hindsight proves the opposite in terms of the role it actually played in bolstering a Mexican brand of graphic cultural expression. First, it "helped articulate and preserve the discourse of cultural nationalism, emphasizing *lo mexicano* and resistance to international culture forces" at a time when those outside forces were becoming increasingly (commercially) assertive and globalized (Rubenstein 127). A veritable labyrinth of administrative delay tactics ensured that foreign comic manufacturers and distributors would become enmeshed in opaque policy while Mexican counterparts, who knew the players and the system, were able to navigate (or not) the system with ease.

Relatedly, the work of the *Comisión* aided the prevention of take-over cultural imperialism by enacting obstacles to the translation and distribution of U.S. comics. They admittedly did not want Mexico to be another stooge that propagated and popularized the "sheepskin of an imperial wolf" that was so sinisterly hiding within the provocative and overly liberated imagery and the violence-obsessed verbiage of U.S. comics. This is an interesting reversal of the "invasion" rhetoric seen time and time again with the Latino Threat Narrative discussed in Chapter One. Rather than the U.S. being besieged with "sneaky" Mexican immigrants, bent on re-taking lost lands and simply biding time until the takeover would begin, Mexico is the one at risk of inundation by sly U.S. ideals that would undoubtedly prove to be corrosive to the health of Mexican social, cultural, and political fabrics. It was a unifying sentiment indeed as both pro-*Comisión* conservatives and anti-censorship modernists shared a

commitment to exclude U.S. comics from the production of cultural nationalism in order to protect *lo mexicano* from ideological invasion.

Finally, the *Comisión* "provided a mechanism by which conservative protest could be channeled and co-opted by the state" (Rubenstein 127). Such a mechanism was essentially a calculated illusion. The co-opting of cultural production is precisely what led to little action or meaningful enforcement being taken against comic publishers, illustrators, or consumers since the supervisors merely had to play the role of enforcement while in turn relying heavily on the many layers of preventative policy between them and any actual significant legal or financial recourse being taken against offenders. It is precisely the "lack of reliable power of enforcement [that] is the clearest evidence that the politicians who wrote the laws…never intended for comic books, or any other form of periodical, to be completely suppressed" (Rubenstein 112). In other words, the *Comisión* was a façade enacted purely to appease conservative dialogue and give the illusion of governmental acquiescence "to the national protective cause" while in actuality recommendations and attempts to censor never truly stood a chance. Pandering to patriotism and profit was far more advantageous.

While two additional anti-comic censorship campaigns ran from 1952-1956 and 1971-1976, there was not a notable shift in regard to marketing or illustrator approach during these times. It was in the 1980s that a "new era" of comic expression began with the more prolific inclusion of "peripheral subjects" such as Chicanos, Latinos, and Latin Americans. It sparked a veritable comic "Latin multiculturalism" that more explicitly "allude[d] to a common cultural experience", one that was more strongly punctuated by trans-border relationships, experiences, and activity (Merino 251). Comics began to openly challenge issues relating to racism, misogyny,

and ideology, and perhaps more importantly began to actively engage with readers to "force them to acknowledge spaces with contradictory realities, which in many cases, [had] previously stood ignored" (Merino 251).

One such contradictory reality that punctuated nearly all Mexican comic production, consumption, and sentiment (pro or anti) from the turn of the century, through the revolution, and onward, was an identity triality that positioned three opposing cultural ideologies uniquely "against" one another: revolutionary culture, with ties to "nineteenth century liberalism", conservative culture, strongly rooted in Catholicism, and international capitalist culture, "created and transmitted by mass media" and trans-national (trans-border) media (Rubenstein 6). These three differing stances operated like mini cultural ecologies, independent yet intertwined with one another, presenting a distinctive scenario within which a "complicity" between the sides developed, or rather a "willingness and ability to go on speaking to (as well as about) each other" to perpetuate a dynamic that "kept Mexican [cultural] society intact" (Rubenstein 103).

From the 1980s onwards, the previous relative passivity towards this triality was openly challenged in an attempt to both reinvent and break with stereotypes by assuming control of them. No longer were Mexican comics "mere objects for entertainment", but rather they were the "expressive and intellectual engine of a graphic world" with a "voice to denounce injustices" and "force the reader to get involved emotionally with the sordid reality of repressive and politicized violence" (Merino 252, 254, 259). Stereotypes encouraged by tropicalization, or tendencies propagated by an U.S. gaze downwards to "appeal to the lowest-common denominator ethnic

clichés", had to be seized and redefined as the new millennium approached (Rubenstein 238).[57] The result has been the creation and circulation of a new space where "the reality of Latino migration, illegal immigration, and the cultural…expression of barrio youth" on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border region could thrive (Merino 254).

II. Political Pictorial Timeline

It is to this "new space" that the discussion now turns. While the same dates (2000-2015) and same publication sources (*El Norte, Reforma*, and *Mural*) as Chapter One were thoroughly searched for relevant political caricatures by Calderón, a handful of specific years stood out for the particularly bombastic imagery and visual/written commentary. Each cartoon was examined along with the articles previously identified in Chapter One for having contained (and repeated) particular trigger words or phrases related to *inmigración* or *frontera*. The rationale behind this pairing was to determine if the cartoons contributed to the narrative(s) being constructed by calculated headline jargon to achieve, when viewed together, a collaborative visual and scripted discussion about the use and abuse of power, ongoing hypocrisy, pervasive and nonsensical anti-Mexicanism, and internal twenty-first century Mexican perceptions of self (Morris 131).

The same themes identified in Chapter One - - patience and conformity, the heroization of border crossers, the blurring of *terrorismo* and *turismo*, becoming fed up with the fantasy - - continue in this chapter to highlight parallels between verbal (headline) and visual (cartoon) narratives during the designated period of time, as well as to accentuate the increasingly embittered tone of Calderon's commentary as relations between the U.S. and Mexico changed in

[57] "Pan y circo, tacos and soccer, is what Latino culture is all about", or "Latino history is like a crowded fiesta: masks, music, and endless energy" (Allatson 238).

the first quarter of the millennium. Notably, of these four themes, the heroization of border crossers was not of principal interest to Calderón's work samples reviewed for this project and is therefore omitted from the discussion below. It is possible that Calderón has visually meditated on this theme in the past, yet the preponderance of commentary about the blurring/mistaking of *terrorismo* and *turismo,* and the blatant sense of *no más* in terms of empty promises and false starts, is obvious. Is Calderón joining the ranks of Villoro, Urrea, and even the *narco corrido* composers and singers to reject, recast, and renegotiate narratives of the past? It would appear so, as will become evident in the discussion to follow. An additional theme not seen in Chapter One emerges, that of the infectious *maldito vecino*.

The 2000s began with ample the optimistic prospect that an improvement in relations and long-awaited immigration reform would flourish under the leadership of presidents Vicente Fox and George W. Bush. Such sentiments (and a presumable pride at finally being recognized as a "peer") were touted in Mexican press with frequent repetition of terms such as *amnestia, obtención automatic de ciudadanía,* and *esfuerzo para restructura la política de inmigración* in an all-around feeling of likelihood that the enacting of such policies would occur.[58]

2001 altered the scene entirely. Published on September 16, 2001, five days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Calderón offered the insightful commentary below that speaks to the diminished hopes and abounding disappointment felt at the prospect of a more equal relationship and migratory reform all but disappearing:

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[58] See Chapter One.

Fig. 12. 16 September 2001.

It is representative of the end of an era between the two countries (or perhaps more aptly, the end of an illusion). The cartoon is grim, depicting former Secretary of Foreign Affairs Jorge Castañeda Gutman with a face and posture suggestive of grief and/or disappointment as he watches the burning Twin Towers on television. With his eyes lowered, hands in his pockets, and a slight slouch in apparent dejected woe, he holds under his arm a smoldering and fading document representative of migratory reform, illustrating how it was quite literally "going up in smoke". Perhaps the palpable sense of grief was based more on the sense of knowing that, "yet again", an opportunity for pro-reform momentum was slipping away, a loss that indeed warranted a period of demoralization. While such a sentiment (and the events leading up to it) is itself not necessarily evidence of long-practiced U.S. hypocrisy, it most certainly served as ammunition for forthcoming frustrations to fester regarding recurrent U.S. duplicity. This particular cartoon is

illustrative of how the genre of cartooning is at its most rudimentary "amplification through simplification" of a message or stance (McCloud 31).

By 2003 a sense of derisiveness was unmistakable in Mexican print media, particularly in regard to what were perceived as reactionary policy follies on a domestic and international scale by Bush. In addition to accusations that the U.S. was confusing "terrorismo con turismo", there was the exasperated acknowledgement that in dealings with countries that posed *actual* threats in a variety of domestic and international capacities, prohibitive policies were not as aggressively pursued as compared to those which were occurring on the U.S.-Mexican border and being enacted within the U.S. towards immigrants of Mexican descent (Chomsky, "How Immigration", Chavez, "Latin Threat"). Calderón suggests that allowances were made for the purpose of deliberate self-interest, gain, and promotion in the cartoon below:

Fig. 13. 10 June 2003.

Evidently, "foreigner fear" was reserved for the "child-breeding", "invasion planning", and "job stealing" Mexican criminals, not the likes of actual megalomaniacal leaders such as Kim Jong-Il

of North Korea. The symbolism of Kim's phallic missile suggests a bold dishabille for the U.S. and Bush's leadership. Bush, dressed as a cowboy (illustrative of his Texas origins and the American "buckaroo" stereotype), exhibits both a shifty disposition and one of eventual indifference to Kim's declaration and potentially obscene behavior. His sole intent appears to be one of moseying by as he extemporaneously inquiries about oil, a resource long connected with his controversial personal dealings while in office. Here, the commentary centers on the notion of U.S. power use and abuse according to self-interest and the propagation of imaginary threats, as opposed to real ones.

Two cartoons speak to a collective frustration about both the *mexicano* tendency to remain fixated on a past, and the apparent futility and inadequacy of Mexican political leaders in confronting plaguing issues such as cartel violence, illustrative of an internal Mexi-centric dialogue and questioning. Calderón voices frustration on the first point on July 4, 2004:

Fig. 14. 4 July 2004.

Such an ardent discontentment could be directed at either a number of internal social issues that were plaguing the socio-political arena, or at the unproductive circular vexation at what was taking place in regard to U.S.-Mexican relations (i.e., stagnation and flip-flopping). While the tone of the comic is a bit unilateral and self-justifying, Calderón makes the point that Mexico's motivations and prospects for an auspicious future will *not* be discovered in the past.

A second example of such a rallying call to action conducive to securing a Mexican convalescence, appears on August 31, 2008 (four years later):

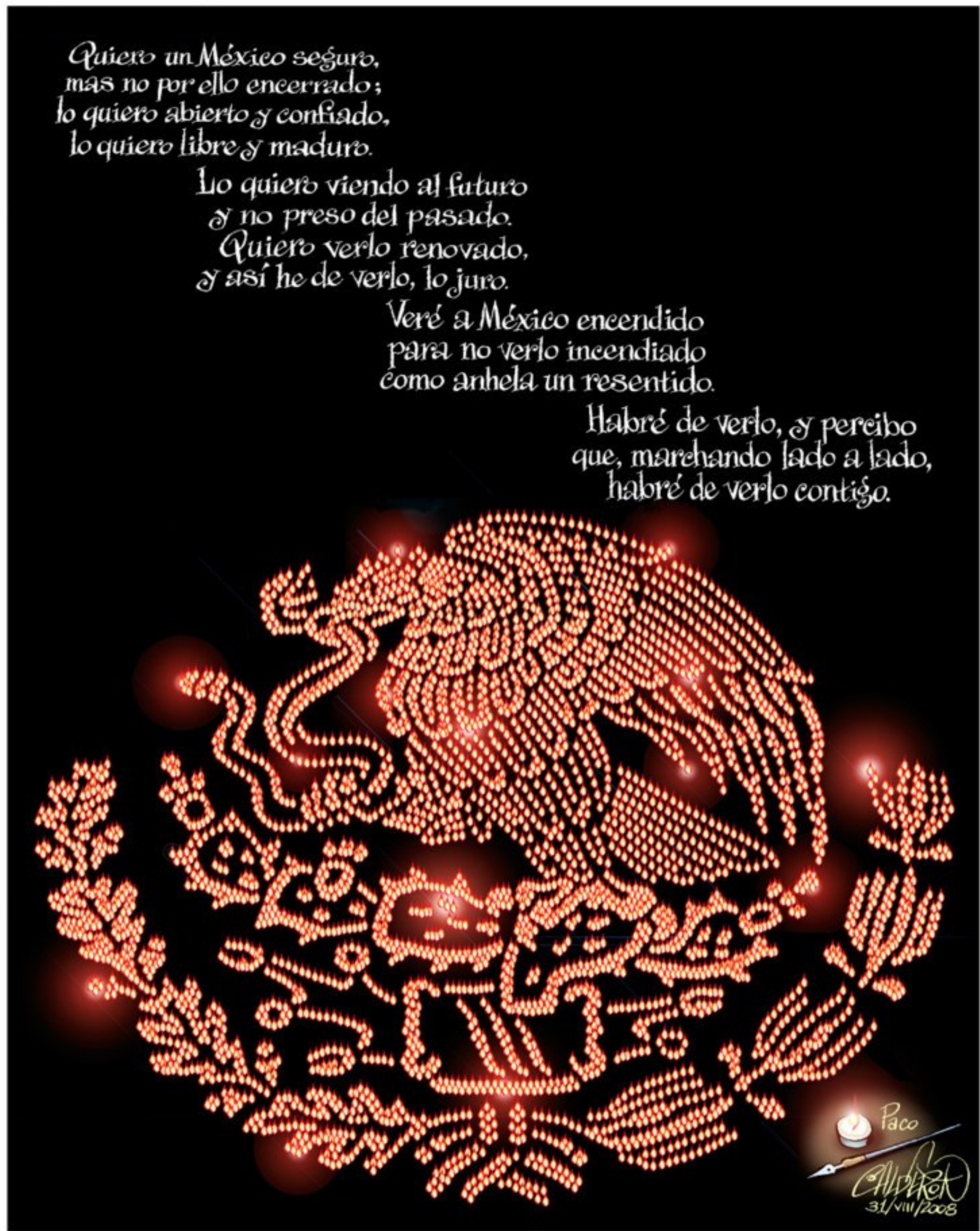

Fig. 15. 31 August 2008.

No longer under the guise the of “cheekiness” from 2004, Calderón directly addresses the issues tormenting twenty-first century Mexican society: multi-level political corruption, cartel violence, stagnated wages, and more. The text takes a front and center role in this cartoon as Calderón voices an appeal for unified action and support for socio-political endeavors such as the *Iluminemos México* movement, a series of peaceful protests across eighty-eight cities to “manifestarse contra la corrupción, impunidad, ineficacia de nuestra [Mexico] autoridades, sobre todo las de seguridad pública y de procuración de justicia” (Montaivo).

In the year immediately prior to the *Iluminemos Movement* and the like, the weariness around internal violence and corruption was not exclusive to Mexi-centric internal dialogue. While Calderón’s two drawings from 2004 and 2008 are demonstrative of an effort to engage in reflection (i.e., what *mexicanos* were thinking, feeling, and doing about Mexican-based issues), jumping back a year to 2007 offers evidence of a mounting exasperation towards (still) on-going U.S. hypocrisy:

Fig. 16. 20 April 2007.

Published on April 20, 2007, four days after Korean-born, U.S.-studying international student Seung-Hui Cho gunned down thirty-two people and wounded seventeen others at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia, Calderón offers a scathing visual commentary by fusing Cho's face with that of Bush. The message is clear: the U.S. is inappropriately duplicitous in its lambasting and hypocritical warnings to avoid Mexico for being exceedingly dangerous at a time when gun violence was (and remains) exceptionally prevalent and arguably uncontrollable.This cartoon hits on two points at once: U.S. hypocrisy and the Latino Threat Narrative discussed in Chapter One.

By this time, Bush had lost all believability among Mexican nationals:

Fig. 17. 18 April 2007.

Beyond the obvious imbecilic personification of Bush, the reader is drawn to two particular details: the presidential "seal" on the podium having been altered as a literal circus-performing seal, and the clearly mortified bald eagle (a long-time national symbol of the U.S.) who appears to share a sense of incredulousness at the notion that the student victims would be at fault for

having been “en el lugar equivocado en el momento equivocado”, and perhaps in angry embarrassment as he covers his face.

Chagrin directed towards the north took a surprising detour from political commentary in 2013 when a United Nations report declared that Mexico had surpassed the United States in national obesity rates to become the most obese country in the world.[59] While Calderón acknowledges that culpability is still one’s own, there is no doubt about who is principally to blame in the following July 14, 2013 comic:

[59] The U.N. report detailed how 32.8% of Mexican citizens were categorized as obese compared to 31.8% of Americans. In the adult demographic, 70% of Mexican adults were labeled obese versus 69% of American adults.

Fig. 18. 14 July 2013.

The title alone speaks volumes, that Mexico has yet again fallen victim to the bad luck of having such a *maldito vecino* as the United States. From left to right, panels three and four gripe about how impossible it is to not succumb to the U.S. imperialist marketing machine that the "chatarreros del norte" employ to invade by way of retailing products such as Coca-cola (the polar bear), Monsanto (the corn), KFC (Colonel Sanders and the bucket of chicken), McDonalds (Ronald McDonald), and fetishized household comforts such as televisions, arm chairs, and TV dinner tables (all decidedly "autóctono" to the "comparsa" *norte*). The formula of convenience, manufactured gastric product, and mindless, lethargic domesticity is the perfect calculation to disseminate an invasive "consumismo" and addictive "sedentarismo" that *Gringo chatarreros* have leveraged to, in essence, infect Mexico.[60]

Still, Mexico is not without some accountability. Images five through eight criticize the contradictory solution of returning to "nuestras raíces culinarias", an action of which would return the public to superior *Aztecan* Adonis physique, health, and virility, yet overlooks the actual components of many traditional dishes. The youth in particular, when given the choice between *chapulines* or a hot dog, look on skeptically as efforts are made to convince that the traditional is what one desires to eat (and more symbolically, generally return to in a broad socio-cultural sense).

Continuing with the theme of self-derision, Calderón published a particularly contemptuous cartoon on February 5, 2014 in recognition of the ninety-seventh anniversary of the Mexican constitution:

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[60] A curious suggestion that reminds one of the LTN discussed in Chapter One.

Fig. 19. 5 February 2014.

The Constitution of 1917 was significant for its focus on social rights and ushered in a reformed social and political model for the twentieth century (Krauze 340-366). Among its many provisions, some of the most notable included free and compulsory public education, land ownership and labor reforms, restrictions on the Catholic Church in the political arena, and guaranteeing health, housing, and rights for women and children (340-366).

Calderón's cartoon is blunt and provocative. The woman has transformed into an inanimate plastic "Judy" doll, a gratuitously sexual apparatus. Her face, while heavily dressed in makeup, is expressionless with unfocused eyes. Her shirt is torn over the shoulder exposing a portion of the breast, suggestive of violation and scuffle yet also surrender and resignation. Her body shows the effects of repeated damage and patching inflicted over the ninety-seven-year period that the Constitution had been in place at the time the cartoon was published. The sash, peculiarly unsoiled, drapes over the doll as though commanding contrived admiration under the guise of pageantry; its color and spotlessness meant to distract from what is immediately under it. Taken together, the image suggests how used and abused the original objectives and provisions

had become in the ever more hostile and self-serving Mexican social and political systems between 1917-2014. It insinuates victimization yet also being gulled, two by-products of either passivity or dysfunction that have evidently led to reflections of total social and political incapacitation on the constitutional anniversary.

Passivity having bred an effeminate submission is the topic of the last cartoon of interest, published on February 21, 2014 in acknowledgement of the North American Summit held in Toluca, Mexico:

Fig. 20. 21 February 2014.

Eyes closed, former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper looks down on Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto with an air of placation and a touch of pity while President Obama stares at Nieto with unmistakable fixed irritation. Harper and then U.S. President Barack Obama are standing close together, side by side, with Obama towering in a dominant position slightly taller

than Harper, who is ever so slightly slouching. As though he were an imp, Nieto gazes upwards at both men while balancing on one toe and throwing the other behind him in a *dégagé*. He offers them a pen to review what seems to be a third attempt to reach agenda assent. Already crossed out are the topics of visa extensions and migrant reform, leaving only hollow pleasantries such as complimenting Tolucan *chorizo*.

III. Conclusions

Efforts to tackle antiquated narratives of self and nation within Mexico are aided by the contributions made by millennial comic writers and illustrators and cartoonists such as Calderón. Similar topics as those seen in Chapters One, Two, and Three grappling with race, gender, intra and inter-national boundaries, among others, are made more lucid through the visual and textual medium of comics and cartoons for the ubiquity and the ease with which they might be consumed and/or shared. In contrast to a headline, literature, or a song, this medium in particular offers a consumer a quickly digestible, low-energy product with which they might experience millennial Mexico as a place negotiating between the old (passé) and the new (progressive). The traits of ubiquity and ease of access are of particular interest in Chapter Five as vital for the final cultural product reviewed for this project: Internet and social media-based memes.

Chapter Five

A New Textual Medium

Fig. 21. *Manos Arriba* and *Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic* by Julio Salgado.

Perhaps the most avant-garde and "millennially" relevant of textual mediums thus far examined in this project (newspaper headlines, short stories, *narco corridos*, and political comics/cartoons), internet memes created and shared by undocumented Latinos in the U.S. have emerged as a distinctive mode of message conveyance, assemblage, and resistance. They are unique social texts that articulate political messages and often consist of specific themes that frequently re-appear, thus perpetuating a social and cultural narrative and facilitating its evolution via consumption and re-iteration. Three themes have been identified in the memes identified for this project: knowledge, (in)visibility, and defiance.

Because of the unparalleled reach and sheer speed of transmission, social media sharing networks have bolstered the visibility of, and impact both within and beyond, an extremely marginalized and politicized community of twenty-first century American social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. Narrowing to a specific time frame and social media channel is necessary as social media activity can be inexhaustibly high-volume. As such, posts between October 2014-March 2017 from the non-profit organization UndocuMedia Facebook page, exclusively those consisting of memes, have been reviewed for this project.

Memes now comprise a uniquely provocative form of "inter-textual" written matter within which a new "bottom up expression" produces an interfusion between "pop culture, politics, and participation", resulting in a near total "blurring of interpersonal communication with mass" (Shifman 7). While memes are primarily shared via person-to-person social media networks on the Internet (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.), they reflect much larger societal mindsets that illuminate more precise, public sentiment. Memes rely on the collective since in order to achieve mass boundary-crossing "spreadability" (the hallmark of a successful meme), the sharers, receivers, and observers must all be (even peripherally) "in the know".

This level of communal cultural knowledge is much easier to achieve in the millennium precisely because of the rapidity and immensity of the Internet, wireless connectability, social networking, and perhaps most importantly, the communicative blurring between digital and non-digital spheres that has resulted. Thus, meme creation, sharing, and viewing have significantly contributed to the establishment of a new breed of "participatory culture" (Shifman 4), a millennial cultural niche within which Latino undocumentedness is able to more visibly exist, thrive, defend, and organize in the U.S.

Each individual who participates in the creation, sharing, or observing of media texts comprises the threads of interaction that "form whole tapestries of public conversations" (Milner 2). These discourses are not trickling from the top-down, as was the previous communicative norm of newspaper headlines or commercial arts (the public being dictated to; the public being handed material for consumption), but rather predominantly emanate from a bottom-up series of actions such as hashtags (#), status updates, remixed and photo-shopped images, and viral videos. In other words, the cultural power position has shifted towards the individual and the general public who, either by oneself or within the collective, composes material to be consumed outward and upward.[61] The creation, circulation, and transformation of images and texts have become something much more socio-culturally impactful than what was previously only a "quirky little JPG from the Internet" (Milner 3).

Yet the notion of memes as a viable textual medium is relatively new. The field of *memetics* was born in the 1990s with one particularly provocative component, the "biological analogies dispute" (BAD), in which memes are equated with viruses. The BAD regards memes as disease agents; they are "the cultural equivalent of flu bacili, transmitted through communicational equivalents of sneezes" (Shifman 11). The obvious issue with such an interpretation is that it quite negatively envisages people to be overly vulnerable and downright powerless to the prepotencies of media "snacks" that "infect" their minds (Shifman 11). BAD challengers call attention to how such an interpretation inaccurately and inappropriately narrows complex human behaviors. Rather than reduce culture to biology, people (transmitters) should

[61] As Milner so pertinently points out, it is an absolute reality that nowadays "[a]mateurs can get famous on YouTube. Protests can start on Twitter. Previously silenced identities can now be an influential part of cultural conversations" (112).

not be considered as mere “vectors”, but as bona fide active agents who, of their own volition, knowingly participate in a cultural process of adaptation, dissemination, and replication of cultural tokens such as memes.

Memes in the millennium have lost their biological connotative roots as social media outlets such as Facebook (est. 2004), Twitter (est. 2006), and Instagram (est. 2010) have gained traction not just within the sphere of popular culture (an arena traditionally with a scope of impact limited to teen and young adult demographics), but also habituated into everyday life (frequented by all age demographics). Internet users of the late 1990s and early 2000s laid the groundwork for such a shift in definition and contemporary levels of meme pervasiveness in how they “co-opted the term [meme], stripped it of some of its strongly Dawkinsian connotations, and reintroduced it to a broader public discourse” (Milner 17). It is now near universally acknowledged that “Internet users employ the word ‘meme’ to describe the rapid uptake and speed of a particular idea presented as a [short] written text, image, language ‘move’, or some other unit of cultural ‘stuff’” (Shifman 13).

Whereas the previous perception of memes was one of short, meaningless cultural “blips” that infected the health of an otherwise virile culture and psyche, memetic opinion has shifted towards valuing those “blips” as being indicative of a collective cultural acknowledgement and interconnection. In this way, memes are not as trivial and mundane as once thought but rather offer insight as to how boundaries have been, and continue to be, eroded between “top-down pop culture” (driven by political and corporate interests) and “bottom-up folk culture” (promulgated by the interests of the “average”, “every day” individual).

Since the practices and politics of meme creation are only recently being expounded on, and a consensus does not yet exist as to how a meme might universally be defined, Shifman offers the following parameters that will be followed in this chapter's analysis for what content comprises a meme: a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, created with an awareness of each other, and circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users (41).

The final point in particular emphasizes how Internet memes are "multiparticipant creative expressions through which cultural and political identities are communicated and negotiated" (Shifman 177). Milner further delineates what an Internet meme "is" by paring down the options to consist exclusively of "linguistic, image, audio, and video texts created, circulated, and transformed by countless cultural participants across vast networks and collectives" (1). The relative facelessness of these innumerable memetic contributors and participants works in favor of meme image and content shareability since "despite relative anonymity and ephemerality" of a globally dispersed user community, "shared" or "common" understanding has the capacity to develop in spades (Milner 88).

I. Memes as Texts

Of interest for this project are memetic phrases and images, consisting of "widely shared catchphrases" and manipulated photos (stock or otherwise) that are used to "to make, argue points, and connect friends" (Milner 1). It will become evident that these "uses" have cultural functions beyond superficial banter: jokes detract from political absurdity, arguing points permit one to assume defensive and protective postures, and connecting friends expands the network of allies. In this way, memes specific to the undocumented Latino community aptly illustrate the

most impactful trait of millennial participatory web culture: a culturally relevant communicative platform that is exclusively of the users, for the users, and by the users.

Successful memes (those with a wide distribution of spreadability and recognition) spread widely and quickly, achieving omnipresence within, and more importantly beyond, the Internet. In today's cultural sphere, ubiquity in one domain (i.e., online) leads to diffusion in others (graffiti, printing on mugs and t-shirts, used on protest signs, etc.), lending itself to the ongoing dissemination, simmering, and perpetuation of a particular sentiment such as, in the context of undocumented U.S. Latinos, *#HereToStay* or *#UndocumentedAndUnafraid*. In a political and activist sense, such "reappropriation of messages by numerous users helps in promoting a topic…which in turn draws more attention to it" via actions that have become relatively mundane: liking, sharing, and forwarding memes outward (and upward) (Shifman 33).

The discussion here examines what features impact the shareability of meme content and what leads a user to pass over, stop and read, share, forward, tweet, etc., and what dictates how much or how little engagement will result. Six attributes contribute to a meme's virality (spreadability): positivity, provocation, participation, packaging, prestige, and positioning (Shifman 69-71). As more users interact with a given meme and their *memetic* (situational) incentive(s), an essential *polyvocal* public participation emerges that serves to either connect and converse, or alternatively argue and antagonize. Emergent from this polyvocality are three themes that dominate the content of the memes selected for review - - knowledge, invisibility, and defiance - - as well as a collective catharsis and/or subterfuge resultant of the proliferation of memes.

Traditionally, the Latino (Mexican) undocumented experience and consequences of Latino immigration enforcement on human lives ("raids, border deaths and disappearances, family separation generalized anxiety regarding deportation") have been examined most predominately through the layering of the lens of trauma over literary examples (Caminero-Santangelo 16). Lamentably, much of the scholarship in the field of trauma studies as related to literature or literary production focuses on the Caucasian Westerner experience, limiting a consideration of how U.S.-based undocumented Latino trauma might potentially fit into the broader dialogue of how national and/or cultural distress manifests in the domain of cultural invention.

Such a gap is precisely where undocumentedness-centric memetic creation and activity (posting, sharing, liking, etc.) emerges as illuminative and meaningful. Having undergone an individual or collective trauma has generally been the point at which disruption, and/or severing of connection to expressive vehicles, occurs. Yet, if "trauma severs our ability to shape [to create and proliferate] meaningful narratives out of a usable past, then narrative-making serves as a traumatic counterbalance" (19). Memetic narratives operate as just such a counterweight to public dialogue and efforts to erase and invalidate an individual's experience as a result of undocumentedness, doing so on an unprecedented scale with an unequalled rapidity due to its predominately viral/web-based, social-media centric domain.

Memes that leverage provocation, participation, packaging, and prestige cheekily juxtapose popular and/or historical imagery with message conveying text precisely to retaliate against narrative-silencing ventures. U.S.-based undocumented Latino memetic activity makes it unavoidable that the event, fact, sentiment, or individual being portrayed become both

“memorable” and referential to undocumentedness in its present capacity: “unafraid” and “here to stay”.

The manner in which this manifests depends on the distinct racial, economic, and political vantage point of the meme creator, viewer, and/or sharer. Memetic commentary within this domain might highlight the nescience or indifference of an individual’s (or societal) stance, draw attention to the obtuseness underscoring many border, immigrant, or Latino laden denunciations, or advocate for empowerment by way of encouraging cultural and historical literacy and solidarity (either to one’s self or towards others). While representing varying perspectives, all share the unifying feature of the intent to inform or become informed, the byproduct of which is the overarching theme of knowledge.

Nescience

Figures 22 and 23 leverage the memetic strategy of juxtaposition to illustrate an incongruence between two or more items with the intent to create a memetic response that highlights a lack, a misappropriation, or a disregard of comprehension towards the U.S. based Latino undocumented community’s history (what led to one’s legal limbo) and/or actualities (the everyday realities of unbelonging):

Fig. 22. 26 March 2017.

Fig. 23. 9 January 2017.

Figure 22 offers two contrasting images of popular rapper and singer Drake, one in which he appears jovial and carefree while in the other his demeanor has changed to cheerless, an abrupt transition of which is accentuated by the more close up nature of the second image. The cause appears to be the sudden recollection of three ideologies - - capitalism, colonialism, and global poverty- - that have consistently been particularly contentious in regard to historical impact within U.S.-Mexican socio-political dialogue.

The side-by-side quick juxtaposition between pleasure and despair activates the "attention philanthropy" component of memetic participation. The viewer is ensnared by the provocation presented; revelry will continue to be encroached on while injustice (capitalism), maltreatment (colonialism), and inequity (global poverty) endure. Such an implication is clear due to the effective side-by-side disparity between Drake in the first image (happy) and the second (troubled), and is even more impactful for those whose "prestige" is not only activated by the references to capitalism, colonialism, and global poverty, but possess an understanding of how

the three ideologies continue to impact specifically Hispanic communities in and outside of the U.S.

While Figure 22 juxtaposes two different images, Figure 23 manipulates the same image from different angles, achieving an effective packaging strategy. The increasing close-up that occurs over four splices contributes to a sense of dawning realization. The meme poses the question “Who’s gonna pay for that wall?”, referencing Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign promise to erect a wall spanning the entirety of the U.S.-Mexican border and require that Mexico bear the cost. The question is uttered in the most wide-frame, top image to perhaps suggest a moment of satisfied reflection by the seemingly hillbilly caricature (a social classification based on the subject’s aesthetics and speech). Slightly closer, the second image begins with the mollified answer that “Mexico” (or rather, “them”, accentuating the problematic “other” designation typical to the Latino undocumented experience in the U.S.) will pay.

The attribute of prestige is curious in this meme example since at first one might think they are activating “user knowledge” on why border wall payment on behalf of Mexico is a reasonable expectation, yet it becomes apparent as one continues through the meme sequence that the user knowledge being prompted is actually the opposite. A letter is omitted with each subsequent iteration of the word “Mexico” while the punctuation “…” alludes to an increasing sense of uncertainty within the memetic character (the process of a new realization emerging). By the last frame, the meme centers on the individual’s snarl as the full, self-damning impact emerges: “Me”, or rather “I” (the foolish, gullible, ultranationalist U.S. depicted by the “hick”) will more than likely finance the entirety of the expense, an unappealing awakening.

A variation of this same memetic message and method, though this time targeting a different U.S. demographic (young, white, U.S. male*)* is seen below in Figure 24:

Fig. 24. 14 January 2017.

Figure 25 offers an acerbic memetic rebuttal to the previously mentioned plan proposed by Donald Trump to build a wall spanning the entire distance of the border land shared between the U.S. and Mexico, though this time the meme focus is on the demand that the Mexican people foot the bill:[62]

[62] This meme was shared to the UndocuMedia Facebook page by another group, Polibeats.

Fig. 25. 13 September 2016.

The meme suggests that, yes; Mexico will certainly pay, as long as the geographic area of the wished-for border wall consists of the land conceded by Mexico to the U.S. under the 1848 Treaty of Hidalgo. Message effectiveness in this case depends on the viewer being cognizant of both the simmering sentiment of having been duped or bullied out of land and riches (particularly gold and oil), and defensiveness that "we" (Mexicans) did not cross the border, rather the border crossed "us":

Fig. 26. 5 December 2016.

Enmeshed in Figures 25 and 26 is a strong sense of being the original and rightful inhabitants of the land on which many family members, acquaintances, or simply fellow countrymen are persecuted via detainment and deportation-centric immigration policies. Strategies of territorial denial had rhetorical consequences. With each instance of reverberation in the domain of public discourse, it delineated who did and did not belong in the nation. The rapidity and pervasiveness that refrains centering on this point saturated socio-political narratives resulted in a strong sense of national *un*belonging for U.S.-based undocumented Latinos that has since become fossilized as the schism between "come heres" and "from heres" continues to widen.

In the domain of Latino self-representation, such stagnated fossilization of U.S.-based narratives has resulted in a recalibration of focus amongst Latino/a producers of cultural output. In the pre-millennial age, consumers of cultural artifacts were reliant on the turnout of writers, directors, photographers, and the like to identify a token (a story, movie, image, etc.) that spoke to their experience(s), and subsequently create something around it to give it tangibility. This was evident in the short stories examined in Chapter Two, the *narco corridos* of Chapter Three, and the political cartoons discussed in Chapter Four. In this way creators operated in a different space than the consumer; creative (and marketing) decisions and directions were theirs to make in order to trickle downwards. Post millennium, with the ease of access and creative potential facilitated by social media networking and applications, cultural producers include the "everyman"/"everywoman" who are now able to guide, influence, and cater narrative output to ensure that their unique take, in this case that of being an undocumented individual in the U.S. socio-political and cultural situation of the 2000s, is included.

Obtuseness

Memetic observation that highlights confusion and/or lack of knowledge on behalf of the documented non-Latinos sect of the U.S. population are further evident in Figures 27 and 28 below:

Fig. 27. No process.

Fig. 28. Thieves.

Both could be considered memetic representations of Aviva Chomsky's thesis in her text *They Take Our Jobs! And 20 Other Myths About Immigration* in which she systematically invalidates twenty-one of the most common refrains used in favor of restrictive immigration and border procedures and aggressive deportation policies. Figure 27 specifically highlights myth seven ("The rules apply to everyone, so new immigrants need to follow them just as immigrants did in the past") and myth twenty ("If people break our laws by immigrating illegally, they are criminals"). Figure 28 grimly cautions against the perplexing stances of myths one (immigrants take American jobs), two (immigrants compete with low-skilled workers and drive down wages), four (immigrants don't pay taxes), and five (immigrants are a drain on the economy).

All of these myths succeed in further perpetuating the fossilized perspective mentioned above of "unbelonging" directed towards undocumented Latinos in the U.S. "Unbelonging" does not merely stall at indifferent marginalization, it bleeds into a much more active stance of perceiving such "unbelonging" as a credible problem (and a criminal one, with violent potential, at that). Little outside of this rhetoric has been able to escape the discursive limitations perpetuated by tolerating only specific or narrowly defined labels (illegal, criminal, other) into the discursive and narrative domain. The multitude of other factors that have contributed to U.S. undocumentedness existing in the fashion that it does, such as "high demand for cheap, exploitable labor", "foreign affairs" (i.e., outbreaks of gang violence), and human rights ("family unity") have not been permitted into broader discursive arenas; collective capacity for what fits in with rhetorical norms and parameters previously could not sustain it, let alone provide a fertile intellectual and social space for it to take root (Caminero-Santangelo 9).

Empowerment

Figure 29 portrays an individual of presumably Hispanic descent assuming a dejected posture in the top section of the image. His arms are crossed, head dejectedly down on a desk, blasé eyes gazing upwards:

Fig. 29. 8 January 2017.

He is separate and isolated from the two individuals in the background, and the scene around him feels sterile. Accompanying it are the words "Before Chicano Studies". One assumes that the bottom image is the same individual, yet he has changed. Now wearing militant regalia, holding a gun in his hands and actively part of a group, his stare is more defiant while he stands in outdoors and verdant scenery. Explanation for such a transformation is simply, "After Chicano Studies". While this particular meme depicts such a transformation in a male figure, memes illustrating the "before" versus "after" effect of embarking on and/or embracing Chicano studies on a female figure are prevalent fixtures as well as evidenced by Figure 30:

Fig. 30. 10 March 2017.

With a stirring visual and verbal transition between only two frames from passive and unassertive to dynamic and bold, Figures 29 and 30 illustrate provocation in action. Packaging is simple yet effective; only four words are needed to inspire participation in two particular capacities: virtual attention philanthropy (liking, sharing, forwarding the meme to other social networks), or delving into what the field of Chicano Studies is (particularly effective for an individual of Mexican descent). Either the viewer's curiosity is inspired to discover more about who/what "Chicano/a"/Chicano Studies are, or their comprehension of the Chicano social, political, and culture movement is stimulated to evoke an *esprit de corps*.

Frozen motion, another memetic strategy, is also effective in highlighting what a meme viewer might or might not "know" about the context being observed (or think that they know, or even refuse to know). It depicts an individual or group essentially frozen in time to accentuate some aspect of the physical action, facial or corporal characteristics, background, inserted text, or some combination, as seen in Figure 31:

Fig. 31. 19 September 2016.

In the midst of what appears to be a protest scene, with a small crowd of people behind her and bloodied hands, the girl clutches the sides an American flag draped over her shoulders. A Mexican flag is tied around her neck with the center of it, representative of the founding myth for Tenochtitlan, displayed most predominately. Whether the decision to exhibit this particular part of the Mexican flag was happenstance or not is unknown, though it seems a curious coincidence that an image with such a strong correlation to the memory of the Aztec people and capital city, and so reminiscent of their demise, should be that which is selected for display in between the American flag.

Additionally, the manner in which the Mexican flag is tied around the meme subject's neck highlights only one of the three backdrop colors on the Mexican flag - - white - - generally considered symbolic of Catholicism. This brings to light another curious coincidence as one homes in on the startling make-up visible on the woman's face and cheeks. Streaming from her eyes are tears of blood, perhaps illustrative of the "weeping Mary" or "weeping statue"

phenomena, reiterative of an underlying spiritual connotation uniquely identifiable within a Mexican socio-religious context.

The image is all the more striking for the motionlessness of the girl in the midst of movement around her coupled with the text. Taken together, the visual alone achieves a high sense of provocation for its stirring macabre nature. The sentence begins with the word "When", almost as though the reader enters the moment mid-thought (perhaps her own) for the lack of pre- or postlude, creating an immediate and exclusionary relationship between the instance described (that of feeling emotional and physical pain for the separation brought on by U.S.-Mexican border enforcement) and the subsequent image of the blood-weeping girl arrayed with the colonizer's flag over her shoulders and that of the colonized around her neck. Packaging is simple in how succinct the written message accompanies the image, which regardless remains the principal impact factor of the meme. Profound user knowledge is not as necessary, though the sentimentality of the meme is increased when the viewer is aware of at what financial and familial cost immigration specific separations occur in the U.S.-based Latino community.

While Figure 31 leverages the stationary stance of the meme character to effectuate a stirring, almost intimate peeping snapshot of an experience, the suspended-in-time moment in Figure 32 is more exertive, as if the viewer were part of the crowd and just happened to glance over at the right moment for the startling act of defiance to be etched in memory:

Fig. 32. 4 December 17.

Few of the faces are visible as most are turned towards the individual leaping over the simulated border wall. The fence jumper has the darkest skin tone of those discernible in the image and is the only one acting in an insubordinate manner. His actions appear to not be cheered on by those at the foot of the "wall", rather the viewer has the impression he is being observed with a mix of incredulousness, displeasure, and/or disregard.

The text states that his action of bounding over the fake border wall, spray painted with the word "TRUMP", is representative of his position on the issue of a potential new (larger) border wall being erected. While his peers are standing on one side, he is choosing to jump over it, a physical representation of surmounting an obstacle that attempts to impede forward motion and/or progress. The image provokes because leaping over the wall affects both a desire to goad the individual on and for oneself not to succumb to an imposed and arbitrary barrier. The latter point in turn encourages participation to follow suit; "you" too could surmount the implied obstacle. Meme packaging is direct, consisting of merely one image and five words, the common memetic refrain of "How I Feel About…" or "How I Feel When…" to chide the border wall situation. Together with the image, this simple statement taps into an emotive angle of user

knowledge, the aspect of if “you get it” then you are “in the know”, and thus part of the community who rejects both the physical border wall structure and its broader socio-political nationalist and isolationist implications.

II. (In)Visibility

The 2008 U.S. presidential election was perhaps the first instance that the Internet and social media were used to observe, comment, and/or participate in socio-political happenings not by “underground” or alternatively-minded techies, but by extremely recognizable public figures (e.g., Barack Obama) and the general public alike. It is also one of the earliest moments in which “viral diffusion” was leveraged in a calculated manner to achieve the most pervasive “virality” possible.

This shift marked a pivotal moment of the digital world fully connecting with and weaving through the “corporeal” world, an interconnection (some might say, interdependence) of which has not abated in the years since. It is an apt assertion that what now “counts” as viable political participation extends to what would have formally been considered as mundane, or even juvenile, practices such as posting or forwarding banter about politicians/political parties/political decisions on social media networks, reading or commenting on blogs, and/or creating or joining like-minded virtual gatherings like those found on Facebook.

Accessing the Internet and checking social media accounts are exceedingly commonplace daily actions by the vast majority of documented and undocumented individuals residing in the U.S. Scrolling through a Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter newsfeed has made it easy to involve oneself in “connective” action and information sharing, and to propagate a “digital coordination” and a sense of sentiment reinforcement amongst thousands (or millions) of like-minded people

who may or may not even be proximately located (Shifman 119-149). Virtual social media network peers have taken the place of physical formal establishments and gathering grounds; the latter no longer offers the type of "personalized content sharing" and easy access across multiple (often synchronous) media networks in which messages may be adapted or personalized to relay how "one's own" experience and perspective fit in with the larger, broader, dialogue (Shifman 128).

Memes are extremely common fixtures in this fresh participatory virtual landscape. They provide an outlet for what, at first glance, appears to be passive "subversion" but that in reality are concrete manifestations of "citizen empowerment" occurring at the most diurnal, mundane level (Shifman 123). In the pre-social media era, memes were mostly limited to circulation among the small community of technophiles who frequented early-Internet chat forums.[63] Nowadays, with such intense social media prolificness, expression via meme creation and sharing is a publicly performative method of displaying opinions and reactions to as far and wide a community as possible. Their "visuality" ensures a greater amalgamation between politics and popular culture precisely because they are "polysemic", open to many simultaneous meanings and interpretations by multiple individuals (Shifman 150).

A rich combination of popular culture and historical referencing are often a meme's graphical centerpiece to create an immediate medium with which polemic and affective topics (such as Latino undocumentedness) is broached. Meme backdrops that involve popular culture and history are the most successful in achieving virality (i.e., visibility) because these topics are

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[63] Such as *Talkomatic* and *CompuServe* of the 1980s, the more mainstream *AOL* chat rooms and instant messenger of the late 1990s, or the early versions of *4Chan* and *Reddit* in 2003 and 2005 respectively.

germane to either what people deliberately experience on a daily basis, or to what comprises their basic situational knowledge. They are an approachable token of recognizable paraphernalia used to widely and popularly address incendiary topics and achieve a level of concise, visually and introspectively stimulating articulation.

Figure 33 offers a prime example of cultural referencing in action: the main message of the meme, “Pase lo que pase, la lucha sigue” is overlaid on the popular memetic image widely referred to as “Success Kid”:[64]

Fig. 33. 20 November 2014.

The principal message is printed in the font style Impact, which is not a casually selected meme typeface aesthetic. Impact font is the most prevalent style used in many memes examined in this chapter, as well as a significant portion of memes in digital circulation. Milner hypothesizes that

[64] “Success Kid” is Sammy Griner, whose mother took a photo in 2007 of her son attempting to eat sand on the beach. The photo went viral in 2010 and was used in 2013 by the Obama Administration as part of an immigration reform campaign and has appeared more broadly in advertisements for Vitamin Water, Virgin Mobile (U.K.), on apparel in the store Hot Topic, and on Xbox screensavers (Feagins, June).

this is due the “strength, clarity, and rhythm” that it conveys, in turn making it “ideal for statements conveyed in short [easily digestible] bursts”, as memes do (68).

While this meme includes content in Spanish and English, the decision to utilize Impact for only the Spanish refrain, as well as to make those words in Spanish the largest, is not happenstance. The emotive response for a viewer “in the know” would certainly be one of power for its decisive upper-case block lettering and intelligibility (one could read only those seven words and conclude the principal message). Visibility of the cause increases because the viewer is immediately drawn to those words (and that particular message) first. Accompanying this Facebook posting is the hashtag #LaLuchaSigue to further reiterate the bolded message coupled with the clenched “fist-pump” and self-resolution depicted by the child.

Figure 34 offers a second example of leveraging a popular culture reference with entirely virtual origins to attract “viewership” (for its associated kitsch) and to visually underscore the intended socio-political meme message:

Fig. 34. 16 October 2014.

The backdrop image is that of the sarcastic Kermit the frog known as "But That's None of My Business", an image first popularized on Instagram around 2014.[65] The meme text suggests that despite having made significant progress in socio-political spheres for the U.S.-based undocumented Latino community via the establishment and proliferation of public organizations and the allocation of specifically designated grant monies, that "many" still (emphasis on an exasperated memetic tone) confuse the 2014 presidential executive order Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), put into action upon signing, with the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which has failed to pass on several congressional occasions despite having been first introduced in 2001 (and would have offered the most comprehensive reform to United States immigration policy since the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986).

The combination of the text at the top of the meme with the conclusion of "But that's none of my business" implies that there are a substantial number of people who remain "ignorant" of such particulars, and that the confusion between two very different pieces of policy are detrimentally misleading to the warping of perception of Latino immigration and Latino immigrants in the U.S. These unapprised "outsiders" are in some ways being categorized as a type of "other" in this context; they are most certainly not included in the meme author's circle of the "informed".[66] Thus, the underlying commentary is a sardonic critique of those who are in the

[65] An Instagram hashtag exclusively for both this meme and other iterations of "sarcastic Kermit" was born on June 20th, 2014. It quickly gained upwards of 140,000 followers on that medium alone, which was replicated on other social media networks such as Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube.
[66] A circle of which, in the context of social media sharing, has the potential to be quite extensive with an unknown number of degrees of separation.

dark (not up-to-date) with policy statuses and decisions underscoring immigration-centric dialogue and debate.[67] It essentially flip flops the standard order of how one visualizes the stance from which one spouts rhetoric, by putting the marginalized (yet experienced) undocumented individual on more sturdy ground directly opposed to the racially, economically, or politically dominant (though ignorant) individual.

The third example in Figure 35 depicts "Conspiracy Keanu" to further illustrate this point of fallaciousness on behalf of the (Caucasian citizen) mainstream in contrast with the veridicality of the (Latino undocumented) marginalized:

Fig. 35. 19 March 2015.

"Conspiracy Keanu" most commonly accompanies meme messaging that cheekily offers paranoid conjectures or sarcastic (sometimes nonsensical) hypotheticals.[68] In this particular

[67] A common reference for "That's None of My Business" are the emoji symbols frog and coffee to represent the sarcastic Kermit and the tea he drinks ( ). This appeared on at least a dozen memes reviewed on the UndocuMedia Facebook page, all in reference to exasperation with a social or political occurrence or policy that impacts U.S.-based undocumented individuals.

[68] It became a memetic fixture in 2010 and solidified its popularity in 2011 with the advent of a fan Facebook page.

meme, the “What If” conjecture challenges oft-repeated assertions about the supposed damage that increased recognition of undocumented Latinos could inflict on U.S. political and economic stability, and cultural and social purity and virtue. The words call attention to the U.S. clichéd tendency to dehumanize and obscure the Latino (particularly Mexican) undocumented migratory demographic via contradictory socio-political policies, and to exploit in labor and wage sectors while eliminating presence of dialogue that might accurately speak to who really makes political and policy decisions, and for what factual and objective motivations.

Combating the notion of conditioned obscurity, Figure 36 exhibits a common optical configuration known as “top-line” in which the uppermost text guides the reader towards that at the bottom, with the image (always serving as the apex) in the middle to separate the two blocks of text:

Fig. 36. 1 February 2017.

The effect is a type of “visual ‘action verb’” that strategically “mov[es] the eye through the image” to take in the top script, pause on the image (in this case, the massive *piñata* Trojan

horse), and conclude at the bottom text where the memetic quip's climax resides (Milner 68). The rib of Figure 36 is the prospect of enacting such a trick in response to the construction of a border wall that mimics the stratagem employed by the Greeks to enter the notoriously well-fortified walls of Troy. Attempts might continue to obscure or minimize the U.S.-based Latino presence for opaque or carefully guarded motivations, but simultaneous efforts to organize and endure will not only persist but become increasingly undisguised.

"Unbelonging" and "unseeable" non-citizens with previously no recognizable, impactful, or meaningful voice within the public sphere have leveraged a cultural token like memes to achieve vocality, visibility, spreadability of ardent message conveyance, resolute existence, and staunch (permanent) habitation. Memetic instruction on behalf of the other (U.S.-based undocumented Latino[s]) to the insider (document possessors) effectively challenges three previously infectious by products of the fossilized, anti -(Latino) immigrant rhetoric: exclusion, unhearability, and alternative facts.

With only two words, "undocumented" and "unafraid", printed over a reproduction of the 1851 painting "Washington Crossing the Delaware", Figure 37 offers a candid statement of intention while leveraging an image long associated with deliberateness, grit, and ultimately, victory:

Fig. 37. 19 January 2015.

This simple yet dynamic refrain is notable beyond the memetic presentation and historical suggestions. The frequency with which “Undocumented/Unafraid” and other similar catchphrases appear as part of both memes and the sidelong postings of the UndocuMedia Facebook page promote an “encrypted narrative” or encoded rallying cry (Shifman 148). They are the ultimate example of a meme’s potential for inducing and perpetuating political participation, particularly in a demographic like U.S.-based Latinos that is increasingly more overtly targeted by political policies and social animus.

Internet based politically oriented memes such as those published by UndocuMedia thus fulfill three “interwoven” functions that encourage a new millennial type of political participation while bolstering a sense of community, all on digital platforms: persuasion or political advocacy, grassroots action, and modes of expression and public discussion (Shifman 123). In reviewing the first 1,974 of the 2,926 photographic posts on the UndocuMedia Facebook timeline (“Fotos de la

biografía"/"Timeline Photos"),[69] three taglines appeared with a noticeable frequency as memetic accompaniments: #HeretoStay, #Resist, and #UndocumentedAndUnafraid:[70]

Tagline	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Posts
#HeretoStay	279	14.1%
#Resist	137	6.9%
#UndocumentedAndUnafraid	137	6.9%

Table 1. Occurrence of catch phrase hashtags.

While these three taglines appeared with the greatest consistency (in the meme text as well as the accompanying post), additional notable hashtags that appeared on posts related to immigration policy and Latino immigrant treatment included #privilege (to emphasize a lack of it), #stayloud, #decolonize, #wakeup, #perspective, #LaLuchaSigue, #politricks, and #UndocumentedUnafraidUnapologetic.[71]

Curious to note in addition to these units of written language are the relentless usage of "emoji" token images that appear alongside the posting and forwarding of, and commenting on, meme-centric posts. At first, I did not consider these visual badges to be of significance since the initial focuses of analysis were the memetic graphics, subtext therein, and corresponding lexeme. However, over the process of inspection, the frequency with which the emojis appeared, and the undeniable interrelation between the selected symbol and post, were too compelling to discount. I

[69] Between Election Day, November 8, 2016 and March 31, 2017.
[70] As of March 31, 2017.
[71] Within Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, it is important to note how hashtags also operate as a type of search engine and can be used to collate stories, thus bringing together many people around the country.

identified five emoji tokens as having a corollary influence on the efficiency of socio-political meme-posts about U.S.-based undocumentedness for the manner in which they provided a subtle pint-sized echo to reinforce memetic messaging:

Emoji Icon	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Posts
Protest Fist	388	19.7%
Heart	277	14%
100 Percent/Points	224	11.3%
Praise/Celebration Hands	126	6.4%
Clapping Hands	81	4.1%

Table 2. Occurrence of catch message pertinent emojis.

While applications for the "protest fist" and "heart" are generally self-explanatory, the "100 percent/points", "praise/celebration hands", and "clapping hands" require context for those perhaps uninitiated in the "emoji" phenomena.[72] Commonly, the "100" symbol is used to indicate that a meme message is "100 percent" accurate, or that the speaker, receiver, and/or participant should receive "100 points" or "full credit" for the truth, exactness, or conviction with which they speak and/or act. The "praise/celebration hands" are employed when one seeks to express unqualified agreement or convey accolade. "Clapping hands" have largely two applications,

[72] Emojis first came into widespread circulation in the U.S. around 2007, though they had been popular since the mid 1990s in Japan.

either to acknowledge achievement or, more sardonically, to “clapback” (a millennial term meaning to return a discourtesy, slander, or impertinence with evidence, humor, dignity, or some combination).

Figures 38 and 39 below illustrate memes and their corresponding Facebook posts in which emojis interwovenly compliment memetic messaging:

Fig. 38. *Pase lo que pase la lucha sigue / No matter what happens the fight continues.*

Fig. 39. *Mi mama me ensenó a luchar / My mom taught me (how) to fight.*

UndocuMedia initiated an outreach endeavor via Facebook and Twitter titled "Here to Stay" to encourage the sharing of stories from those living with DACA:

Fig. 40. *Here to Stay* Campaign.

At least a dozen individuals were featured provided with a platform to share their experiences in a public forum with the intent to normalize them and, in turn, those "like them". The "Here to Stay" slogan bleeds directly into the notion of "Undocumented and Unafraid" and its sibling, "Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic", seen in Figures 41, 42, and 43:

Fig. 41. Undocumented/Unafraid Poster.

Fig. 42. Undocumented, Unapologetic, Unafraid Poster.

Fig. 43. Undocumented, Unafraid, Unapologetic Meme.

Figures 41, 42, and 43 are all snapshots captured at various protests and marches for which UndocuMedia served as a particularly active propagation and information distribution point. The usage of the specific phrases so closely tied to efforts by UndocuMedia to encourage undocumented Latino youth to flaunt their presence, lay bare their contentious legal status, and

achieve meaningful vocality and visibility in a public sphere evidence the proliferation of the sentiment beyond a virtual community.

Because memes are such short and succinct visuals, relying on little to achieve big and lasting impact, they are all the more digestible. As is evident in memes reviewed here, the three themes of knowledge, (in)visibility, and defiance underscore how "the past makes sense in the present, to others who can understand it, sympathize with it, or respond with astonishment, surprise, even horror" (Caminero-Santangelo 20). Memes thus assist in the expanding and enriching of a sentiment towards inclusivity and solidarity, and bolster two vital socio-cultural processes: making a "comprehensible" visual narrative byte out of previously "incomprehensible" and/or silenced "atrocities" and transitioning from trauma to the more in-command stance of testimony (Caminero-Santangelo 21-22).

Comprehensiveness highlights the reach and sense of empowerment provided by undocumented-centric memes. With this particular demographic, the effort to transition from incomprehensible to comprehensible is perhaps most related to the transition phase, representative of the second rung on the ladder demarcating the experience of migration (Chavez, "Shadowed" 92). It is within this period that other immigrants (i.e., non-Latinos) transition from "temporary to settlers" (Chavez, "Shadowed" 92), a result of which has proved elusive for the millennial undocumented community. In these cases, the "transition phase begins with crossing the border, but never comes to a close; these people never accumulate enough links of incorporation…to allow them to become settlers and feel part of the new society" (Chavez, "Shadowed" 92).

Thus, the third phase consisting of “incorporation” never comes to fruition and, in fact, “stretches into infinity” (Chavez, “Shadowed” 92). Consequences of existing in this “infinite” legal, social, and cultural no-man’s land have traditionally fallen on deaf ears in more mainstream domains. Acknowledging illegality requires an experiential recountment of which “must not” be permitted a large-scale presence, perhaps due to the challenge that giving voice to certain realities and truths would impose on U.S. political activity and notions of self. It has been aggressively silenced or finagled with, never finding a solid foundation from which to launch and perpetually enduring an unmovable and plaguing “unhearableness” (Chavez, “Shadowed” 94).

Memes take this trait’s cousin - - “unseeableness” - - and flip it on its head. Meme circulation is promulgated by social media sharing and algorithms that heighten self-made, self-perpetuated “echo chambers”. Clicking, liking, commenting, or reacting in any digital fashion to a simple memetic post ensures its rapid and wide distribution within a U.S.-based Latino and non-Latino context. “Unseeability” has become a brazen yet easily-consumable informational image byte of resistance, solidarity, and/or narration powered by colloquial language, attention grabbing backdrops, lack of dense text to read, and no pages to turn.

There is some variance between the English “testimony” and its Spanish counterpart, “testimonio” mentioned in point three. Testimony “implies giving information to those that would otherwise not have access to it” (Caminero-Santangelo 22), an implication of which could be interpreted according to the meme samples (and accompanying hashtag slogans and emojis) reviewed as information directed to the un- or misinformed, non-Latino U.S.-based reader/consumer. Or, with the prolificness of social-media sharing in mind, such information provision facilitated by “testimony” could also amp up the echo chamber effect; the reciprocity of

like-minded sharing (an internal corroboration of fact, sentiment, and experience) that grows and grows, expanding each memetic nugget of “testimony” to include others who are superficially “part” of the “same” group. They may have previously been outside of that particular “chamber” but are no longer so due to testimonial exposure.

“Testimonio” on the other hand does not carry the same connotation of simply passing along information to newcomers. Rather, it assumes a meaning of “political agency and empowerment…intended to go beyond witness-bearing context - - beyond mere testimony - - to have real world impacts” (Caminero-Santangelo 23). Therefore, as evidenced by the memes reviewed in this chapter, millennial memetic activity, an age of engrained, obsessive, and prolific social media, offers a new narrative framework and textual medium within which a forum exists to give voice, presence, and existence to a community previously banished to the fringe and the shadows.

III. Conclusions

The participatory culture promulgated by meme creation, sharing, and viewing has aided in the creation and solidification of a new millennial cultural niche where U.S. based Latino undocumentedness can exist, thrive, defend, and organize in a different capacity than previously seen with newspaper headlines, literature, *narco corrido* songs, or political cartoons. It is due to the uniqueness of the meme medium, being ubiquitous, easily digestible, knavish when necessary, and with an unparalleled longevity due to the nature of the Internet, that re-casted and renegotiated social and cultural narratives have been able to flourish at a time of socio-political combativeness, uncertainty, and dehumanization on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican Border. While perhaps the most unconventional of the visual and textual mediums examined in this

project, memes represent a distinctive mode of message conveyance, assemblage, and resistance for the undocumented Latino (Mexican) community in the U.S. that should not be ignored.

Conclusion

"Unafraid" and "unapologetic" have become generation-defining rallying calls on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican Border in the first quarter of the millennium. They reflect a mentality that is being honed and shared by Mexicans and undocumented individuals alike who seek to renegotiate and recast antiquated or fossilized racial, gendered, and national notions of one's self and broader community. It has been this project's objective to determine what these notions are and how millennial cultural producers are reshaping them via five particular domains (newspaper headlines, literature, music, political cartoons, and memes). In conjunction with tackling what are perceived by millennials to be offensively archaic notions of race and gender, four themes were tracked as constant between the cultural products examined in this project: patience and conformity on behalf of Mexican policies towards the U.S., heroization of border crossers, the blurring of *terrorismo* and *turismo*, and ultimately becoming fed up with a "fantasy".

The newspaper headlines of Chapter One established that there is a meaningful degree with which calculated jargon is propagated within Mexican consumer spheres and that they do encourage micro-narratives to veer one discursive direction or another. When held up against the ways in which such periodical narrative construction occurs in the U.S.-based Latino Threat Narrative (LTN), an interesting contrast emerged. While U.S. headline lingo tends to exaggerate, distort, and deceive in order to rally consumers around nationalistic interests, Mexican headline narratives tend to swing into decrying happenings with an emphatic accuracy. The regularity of specific terms in Mexican newspaper headlines between 2000-2015 related to *inmigración* and *frontera* confirm that while aspects of the threat narrative formula application are slightly different from the LTN version observed in the U.S. (e.g., falsification versus accuracy), a

similarly influenced socio-political response does emerge. Overall, Mexican newspaper headlines between 2000-2015 encouraged a defense of Mexican interests, exposed and challenged U.S. duplicity, and recognized a different set of priorities for millennial Mexico persistently related to bolstering a sense of *mexicanidad* that was not obsequious to the U.S.

Such a shift in priorities is again evident in the literary examples of Chapter Two. The internal and external dichotomies resultant of shedding its long-held sense of necessary subordination to its domineering northern neighbor are at the forefront of "Mariachi", "Amigos mexicanos", and *Into the Beautiful North*. Internally, themes of sexuality, machismo, and femininity/feminism are constantly re-negotiated through the situations within which characters find themselves. Patriarchal architypes such as La Malinche, La Llorna, and el macho are challenged by advancing narratives of contestation and re-invention that break from racial, gendered, and classist norms. Externally, trans-nationality becomes a significant plot device in all three works; Mexico and the U.S. are perceptible characters with whom each protagonist's own development advances and crises resolve. Villoro and Urrea access the literary sphere to literally author into being progressive versions of long-held archetypes, following in the tradition of many female writers who preceded them but were excluded. Writing into existence a non-traditional cast of millennial-minded characters ensures that their newly honed active voice will be consumed and will reverberate.

Consumption and reverberation of re-casted and re-negotiated internal and external narratives by millennials was the topic of Chapter Three, though the discussion turned from positive cultural influencers of the millennium (female empowerment, female heroism, mollescent masculinity) to those with a more toxic impact. It is still undetermined whether the

sinister content and performance of the popular *narco corrido* subset *movimiento alterado* represent development or degeneration within the Mexican millennial cultural sphere. There is a blatant duplicity with which popular *movimiento alterado* groups such as the BuKnas de Culiacán conduct themselves and their businesses that leave a bitter aftertaste. Regardless, it is certain that the macabre lyrical and aggressive behavioral styles of creators and consumers alike suggest a strong desire to forcefully reinterpret long existing narratives, particularly those that relate to authority and access to privilege. The novelty of *movimiento alterado* lies in the nihilistic approach to do so, yet newer compositions by *narco* singers such as Gerardo Ortiz suggest cultural fatigue that hint at a recognition about the impossible one-upmanship of *narco* banditry.

The *narco corridos* of Chapter Three and the political cartoons of Chapter Four share the common traits of existing within a micro-level popular culture niche and of possessing an ease with which they might be consumed. The long tradition of cartooning within Mexico facilitates a greater latitude for illustrators to confront and mock themes that are in transition between passé to progressive. Political cartoons of the millennium can be viewed as a type of graphic-centric literature, not as hollow or lowbrow, due to their ability to recast sensitive and/or polemic situations and themes in a cathartic and enabling way. Illustrators such as Calderón make conscious decisions; the placement, inclusion, exclusion, coloring, etc. can be read as acts of defiance that speak to an oppositionality of internal (Mexico on Mexico) and external (between Mexico and the U.S.) matters. The political cartoons published by Calderón between 2000-2015 demonstrate this in action within a millennial Mexico, particularly in regard to intra and inter-national boundaries and the themes of patience and conformity, heroization, muddling *terrorismo*

and *turismo*, and being fed up. They touch a nerve just like the au courant *narco corridos* written and performed by the BuKnas de Culiacán do, yet also leverage humor in a way not seen with newpaper headlines and literature to serve as a particularly apt barometer of social attitudes and to aid with understanding the ebbs and flows of millennial re-casting and re-negotiation.

Ubiquity, ease of access, and humor have transformed during the first fifteen years of the millennium thanks to the Internet and prolificacy of social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. There is a socio-cultural saturation of memetic images and catch phrases that has resulted in their becoming a viable textual medium that can be read with a critical lens, especially when these tokens are leveraged by demographics such as undocumented millennial Mexicans in the U.S. This is a group increasingly confronted with social, political, and economic threats, relegated to the margins, yet continue to achieve a coalescence and momentum that is resolutely unified. They have seized the imposed identity marker of "undocumented" and completely re-casted it to become both "undocumented and unafraid" and entirely "unapologetic" for it. The contributions that memes related to undocumentedness play in such efforts to bolster this community and to achieve an impressively broad connectability are what make the memes examined in Chapter Five so novel. The participatory culture that has burgeoned between 2000-2015 has made it so that certain meme images and phrases are so communally recognizable that they must be viewed in the same realm as popular cartoon characters, song lyrics, literary personalities, and newspaper catch phrases.

The millennials of Mexico and of the undocumented U.S. community are seizing a momentum that demands the re-casting and re-negotiating of long-held identity markers related to race, gender, and intra/international relations. What is different about the messages of the

millennial Mexican and U.S.-based undocumented demographics is that they are not becoming fossilized, stagnant, or antiquated. After fifteen years they continue to reverberate with each new socio-political iteration of calculated cultural production that in turn increase its visibility and ensure its relevance with audience reach and depth of meaning. Through calculated and conscious usage of newspaper headlines, literature, music, political cartoons, and memes the cultural producers and consumers of this generation are succeeding in re-introducing themselves and their communities in capacities that move previously marginalized peoples out of the shadows.

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