

Romance, Revolution and Regulation: Colonialism and the US-Mexico Border in American Cold War Film

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2013

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Abstract

The 1950s saw perhaps the largest number of American films set on and around the US-Mexico border of any period of the twentieth century. This thesis investigates why this concentration of films appeared at this point in time. It argues that rather than responding to the changes in policy and practice along the borderline that were taking place in the 1950s, these films engage with cold war politics as they explore the relationship between the United States and Mexico through ideas of romance, revolution and regulation. The thesis contributes to the growing field of cultural studies of the Cold War by contending that these movies engage with cold war discourses of colonialism. I argue that through images of the US-Mexico border, colonialism is interrogated and that the international boundary is thus produced as a site through which concerns about the United States' place in the cold war world are articulated. While much existing scholarship has examined the relationship of specific genres such as science fiction, westerns and film noir to cold war politics, this thesis moves away from such generic constraints to focus on films of different genres which feature representations of the US-Mexico border. The thesis' central contribution therefore lies in its assertion that a study which is attentive to cinematic space and focused on a particular cinematic location can provide new ways of understanding cold war culture, and that American cinematic engagement with the Cold War is not limited to or defined by generic frameworks.

Contents

Abstract	2
Contents	3
Acknowledgments	4
Introduction	5
PART ONE Romance: Tourists, Lawbreakers and Undercover Cops	30
Chapter One: The Romance of Mexico: Tourists, Fugitives and Escaping the US in <i>Where Danger Lives</i> (1950)	31
Chapter Two: Masquerades, Mapping and Transformation: Identity and Ethnicity in <i>Borderline</i> (1950)	45
Chapter Three: Danger, Disappearance and the Exotic: American Travellers and Mexican Migrants in <i>Wetbacks</i> (1956)	65
PART TWO Revolution: Territory, Nation and Politics	82
Chapter Four: The Revolutionary Politics of Mexico: <i>Vera Cruz</i> (1954) and Representations of Individualism	85
Chapter Five: Territory, Colonialism and Gender: <i>Border River</i> (1954) and the American Frontier.....	100
PART THREE Regulation: Criminality, Identity and Mobility	118
Chapter Six: Ethnicity, Imperialism and the Law: Policing Identities in <i>Border Incident</i> (1949)	119
Chapter Seven: Border Cities as Contested Space: Postcolonial Resistance and <i>The Tijuana Story</i> (1957)	139
Chapter Eight: Imperial Journeys and Travelling Shots: Regulation, Power and Mobility in <i>Touch of Evil</i> (1958).....	156
Conclusion	177
Appendix A: Indicative List of Cold War Border Films	189
Appendix B: Publications	193
Bibliography	194
Filmography	225

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I am extremely grateful to the AHRC for the PhD studentship I was awarded and without which I would have been unable to undertake this research. Many thanks are also due to the University of East Anglia for providing support and training and to my supervisors, Mark Jancovich and Brett Mills who have offered me invaluable advice and guidance throughout the past three years. Thank you also to my MA supervisor Jann Matlock for her support and encouragement with the project proposal. I am grateful to the extremely helpful staff at the British Film Institute library and the British Library for all their assistance with my research.

I would like to thank my fellow School of Film, Television and Media PhD students for their collegiality and useful feedback in our work in progress seminars. Thanks are also due to the critical writing workshop group – particularly Kate Jones, Kelvin Knight, Stephen Mitchell, Tim Jones and Ed Clough – for their insightful feedback on early versions of several chapters of the thesis. I am extremely grateful to Nina Mickwitz and Sophie Halliday for their superb work proofreading and providing comments on the whole thesis in its final stages and especially for Thursday night drinks.

I must also extend heartfelt thanks to a great many friends and family who have given me their support throughout this process, and I apologise for not being in touch as much as I would have liked. Special thanks to Rachel Eddy, Sarah Ross and Jo Phillips for hosting me in London, coming to visit Norwich and for some brilliant and much-needed holidays from the thesis! I am also hugely grateful to Dr Maria Thomas for her constant encouragement, generous advice on all aspects of academic life and general PhD camaraderie. And here is acknowledgment number two for Mat Croft, Tamar Nissin and Anthony Lloyd for their friendship and support.

Special thanks are due to Matt Woody for his continuous support and interest in my project, helpful ideas and for moving to Norwich with me. To Sally, Graham, Carrie and Ellie Fuller, and Val and Roy Muscutt, I will always be grateful for your love and encouragement throughout my university career and for all the wonderful visits to Long Buckby, Lincoln, Heacham and San Felieu.

Introduction

...they crossed sometime near noon the international boundary line into Mexico, State of Sonora, undifferentiated in its terrain from the country they quit and yet wholly alien and wholly strange.¹

The US-Mexico border has been an iconic space in American film ever since movies were invented. As the Ringo Kid and Dallas head across the border into Mexico to start a new life at the end of *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), the border becomes a space of renewal and hope where their romance can flourish. For *South of the Border* (George Sherman, 1939) starring Gene Autry's singing cowboy, the border similarly offers the promise of romance, but while Autry serenades a beautiful senorita one moment, he is captured by Mexican revolutionaries the next. Mexico also became synonymous with ideas of revolution in films such as *Vera Cruz* (Robert Aldrich, 1954) and *The Professionals* (Richard Brooks, 1966) as American heroes head south of the border to join the revolution and test their political ambitions against those of the Mexican radicals. Additionally, crossing the US-Mexico border has often served as an escape from the regulations of American law. As Bart and Laurie tear south through the United States in *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1950), the international line harbours an elusive promise of escape from the police on their tail. But the border itself is also regulated, particularly for those seeking to head north into the United States, and films such as *Border Incident* (Anthony Mann, 1949) dramatise the exploitation and hardships faced by Mexican workers in the American south. Marked variously by barbed wire fences, border posts, rivers, immigration checkpoints, or by nothing at all, the US-Mexico border inhabits different forms in keeping with the different stories these films tell. With their themes of romance, revolution and regulation, this thesis seeks to understand what connects these films and what their relationship might be to the real US-Mexico border.

The 1950s saw perhaps the largest number of American films set on and around the US-Mexico border of any period of the twentieth century.² This thesis investigates why this concentration of films appeared at this time. It argues that rather than responding to the changes in policy and practice along the borderline taking place in the 1950s, these films engage with cold war politics as they explore the relationship

¹ Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* (1993; repr., London: Picador, 1994), 74.

² See Appendix A for an indicative list of border films from this period.

between the United States and Mexico through ideas of romance, revolution and regulation. While much existing scholarship has examined the relationship of specific genres such as science fiction and film noir to cold war politics, in this thesis I move away from generic constraints to ask what a specific cinematic location might reveal about the cultural history of the Cold War. I further contend that cinema becomes an important space in which the United States imagines itself during this period. The thesis therefore argues that colonialism is interrogated through images of the US-Mexico border, and that the international boundary is produced as a site through which concerns about the United States' place in the cold war world are articulated. The chronology of the Cold War has been much debated among historians, with some arguing it lasted in total from 1945 to 1991. However, I will use 'cold war period' to refer to what M. Keith Booker terms the 'long 1950s,' and Alan Nadel calls the 'peak cold war,' covering the period of approximately 1946 to 1964, and centring on the 1950s.³ As Booker argues, this periodisation encompasses the development of the Cold War from its initial outbreak up until the period when 'nuclear and anti-Soviet paranoia in the United States began noticeably to decline.'⁴

At the American cinematic border, images of Mexico become politically potent across the whole ideological spectrum. While films depicting this location may present heroic Mexican revolutionaries and exploited migrant labourers, they might equally show despotic rebellion leaders and usurping invaders. Moving beyond a study of Hollywood's left- or right-wing factions, the thesis instead develops an understanding of the ways in which colonialism functioned within cold war debates. It investigates how cold war border films impact upon cultural understandings of the US-Mexico border in the United States, and argues that these cinematic spaces have complex, tangible effects on the real world border and the relationship between the two countries. In the study I focus on eight films from the cold war period that feature border crossings: *Border Incident*, *Borderline* (William A. Seiter 1950), *Where Danger Lives* (John Farrow, 1950), *Vera Cruz*, *Border River* (George Sherman, 1954), *Wetbacks* (Hank McCune, 1956), *The Tijuana Story* (Leslie Kardos, 1957) and *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958). In undertaking close textual and contextual analyses of these case

³ M. Keith Booker, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 3; Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism and the Atomic Age* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 4. For a definition of the long Cold War, see for example, David S. Painter, *The Cold War: An International History* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

⁴ Booker, *Monsters*, 3.

studies, I aim to demonstrate that the relationship between film and politics is one of debate and contradiction, not singular political positions, and that a study which is attentive to cinematic space and focused on a particular cinematic location can provide different perspectives on cold war cultural politics than existing generically-focused studies offer. This introduction details the scope, scale and methodologies of my research, indicating the areas of existing scholarship this thesis will cross paths and enter dialogue with, and outlines the structure of the remaining chapters.

The US-Mexico border and cinema

The 1950s was a highly turbulent period in terms of border policy.⁵ It saw temporary labour programmes recruit tens of thousands of Mexican workers in the US south, huge rises in undocumented migration, and mass deportation exercises.⁶ Public opinion on the increased presence of Mexicans in the US was sharply divided, with business leaders keen for labour programs to extend and expand, while American workers often saw the lowering of wages in the south as a direct result of the presence of documented and undocumented Mexican migrants.⁷ Against this rising public objection, 1954 saw the deployment of ‘Operation Wetback.’ It was the largest

⁵ For insightful histories of the border which detail such changes, see for example David Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century: A History of Economic and Social Transformation* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999); Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) and Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on 'Illegals' and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* 2nd ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2010). More specifically on the border and migration see Kitty Calavita, *Inside the State: the Bracero Program, Immigration, and the INS* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992); Patrick Ettinger, *Imaginary Lines: Border Enforcement and the Origins of Undocumented Immigration, 1882-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009) and Raul A. Fernandez and Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations and Migration* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

⁶ A note on terminology: I use the term ‘undocumented’ to describe migrants without official permission to stay or work in the US throughout the thesis. Today’s popular lexicon of ‘illegal aliens’ and ‘illegals’ is both pejorative and inaccurate; as Kevin Johnson argues, the term ‘illegal’ ‘fails to distinguish between types of undocumented persons in the United States.’ Given the specific historical context and the fact that US immigration agencies often turned a blind eye to such undocumented migration during this period (see chapter three), the illegality of this kind of border crossing is itself questionable. I further differentiate between ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’ deliberately. ‘Migrant’ is used to describe people intending to stay temporarily or periodically in the US, as was the case for many Mexican workers crossing the border during the 1950s. ‘Immigrant’ is used to refer to those with the intention of staying permanently in the country. See Kevin R. Johnson, *The ‘Huddled Masses’ Myth: Immigration and Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 156. For authors which take a different stand on these terminological issues, see for example, Linda Newton, *Illegal, Alien, or Immigrant: The Politics of Immigration Reform* (New York: New York University Press, 2008) and Frank D. Bean and Marta Tienda, *The Hispanic Population of the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1987).

⁷ See John A. Garcia, ‘The Chicano Movement: Its Legacy for Politics and Policy,’ in *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads: Social, Economic, and Political Change*, ed. David R. Maciel and Isidro D. Ortiz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 83-107.

deportation operation the country had seen and sought to remove Mexicans present in the US without proper documentation and send them back below the border. The operation resulted in the deportation of around two million Mexicans, but in reality this also included many legally resident Mexican-Americans and Americans who were caught up in the sweep.⁸ In addition, the US government embarked on programs to increase the physical fortification of the boundary, to bolster Border Patrol presence, and to tighten regulations at border check points.⁹ Set against this complex and changing environment, the films set on and around the border from this period might be expected to articulate a direct response to these events. However, as the thesis unfolds I will argue that these border films are not concerned with the state of the contemporary US-Mexico boundary. The thesis therefore sets out to investigate what these films might be reacting to and how, and why so many border films were produced at this point in time.

Given today's crises of migration, drugs and violence on the US-Mexico border, it is crucially important to understand the boundary's history. Because this thesis contends that cinema is one of the key spaces in which the United States imagines itself, the history of cinematic engagement with the borderline becomes vital to understanding the way in which the border operates in American culture today. Despite US and Mexican government policies to control the international boundary, the border continues to see undocumented migrant traffic, drugs and arms trade, femicide in Ciudad Juarez, the rise of lethal cartel warfare, and the killing of unarmed migrants by American border police.¹⁰ The thesis will argue that representations of the border in American cold war culture served not to engage with, debate or raise awareness of border policies, but as an arena where the United States' place in the wider world was negotiated. This implies that today too, cultural understandings of the border in

⁸ Lorey, *U.S.-Mexican Border*, 121.

⁹ See Timothy J. Dunn, *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border 1978-1992: Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home* (Austin: Centre for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas, 1996).

¹⁰ For useful accounts of the current situation on the borderline see, for example, Kathleen Staudt and Irasema Coronado, *Fronteras No Más: Towards Social Justice at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Andrew Grant Wood, ed., *On the Border: Society and Culture Between the United States and Mexico* (Lanham and Oxford: SR Books, 2004); Alejandro Lugo, *Framed Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); David Spener and Kathleen Staudt, eds., *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1998); Pablo Vila, *Border Identifications: Narratives of Religion, Gender, and Class on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Ed Vulliamy, *Amexica: War Along the Borderline* (London: Vintage, 2011) and Melissa W. Wright, 'Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico-U.S. Border,' *Signs* 36 (3) (2011): 707-731.

American culture may be more closely related to the United States' global positioning than to addressing the critical situation on the borderline itself.

Several books and articles have previously been published which specifically address the representation of the US-Mexico border in American cinema. These studies tend to view the cinematic border and Mexico as devices which are used to promote particular 'American' ideals such as expansion and individualism. For David Maciel, the cinematic border represents 'the lawless, primitive and rugged last frontier of the United States.'¹¹ Maciel invokes the history of America's conquest of the continent, suggesting the films represent the spirit of manifest destiny, or the god-given right to conquer any land, even Mexico. In contrast, Camilla Fojas argues that border films 'do important social work: they offer a cinematic space through which viewers can manage traumatic and undesirable histories and ultimately reaffirm core "American" values.'¹² Carlos E. Cortés espouses another view, suggesting that the Hollywood border serves simply as 'a backdrop for American activity, a foil for displays of American superiority.'¹³ Although these theorists take different approaches, common to all of their arguments is the idea that Hollywood's cinematic border functions only to champion or reaffirm American culture and identity, an assertion that this thesis seeks to challenge.

A further problem in existing criticism of border films from the post-Second World War period is its overwhelming focus on *Touch of Evil*. The film is used as the sole example of work from the mid-twentieth century period in William Nericcio and Donald Pease's work, and similarly Peter Wollen's study of *Touch of Evil*'s historical contexts including contemporary border policy ignores the existence of any other films about the border from this period.¹⁴ This thesis expands on this literature by broadening its investigation to include other cold war border films. It argues that *Touch of Evil* must be viewed within the context of this wider body of films, rather than as a standalone work. In addition, existing scholarship on representations of the border has

¹¹ David R. Maciel, *El Norte: The U.S.-Mexican Border in Contemporary Cinema* (California: San Diego State University Press, 1990), 83.

¹² Camilla Fojas, *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 2.

¹³ Carlos E. Cortés, 'To View a Neighbor: The Hollywood Textbook on Mexico,' in *Images of Mexico in the United States*, ed. John Coatsworth and Carlos Rico (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, 1989), 95.

¹⁴ William Anthony Nericcio, *Tex[t]-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the 'Mexican' in America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Donald Pease, 'Borderline Justice / States of Emergency: Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*,' *The New Centennial Review* 1 (2001): 75-105; Peter Wollen, 'Foreign Relations: Welles and *Touch of Evil*,' *Sight and Sound* 6 (10) (1996): 20-23.

only rarely considered the literal, physical and visual manifestations of these depictions. When it has done, theorists such as Claire Fox have focused solely on iconic images such as the fence and the river.¹⁵ However, the cinematic border takes many different forms, and in many cases it is only present as an absence in films, signified either through cuts or through an unending expanse of landscape unmarked by lines or posts. As I will argue, the US-Mexico takes on many different visual forms and the meanings of the border are inextricably linked to its spatial manifestation. Through the border's visual representation, themes of romance, revolution and regulation come to the fore and issues of colonialism are made manifest.

Colonialism and the Cold War

By the time of the Cold War, the United States had long seen itself as opposite and antidote to old world empires. The 1823 Monroe Doctrine had established the policy of preventing European interference and intervention in the Americas.¹⁶ Through this foreign policy, the US sought to prevent Latin America from becoming subject to colonial power again. In the 1950s, the language of colonialism was crucial to cold war debates and formed a key component of cold war rhetoric. The spirit of the Monroe Doctrine pervaded policy statements which declared the country fully in support of the 'principles of self-determination for all peoples who desire it and are able and willing to undertake its burdens.'¹⁷ The United States government framed the Soviet Union's encroachment into Eastern Europe as a colonial phenomenon and maintained a staunchly anti-colonialist position itself, calling Russia the 'largest existing colonial power' and condemning the 'menace' of the 'Soviet brand of colonialism.'¹⁸ However, as Mark Philip Bradley has suggested, this was a form of anti-colonialism 'in which racialized perceptions of backward non-Western peoples undercut support for

¹⁵ Claire Fox explores the physical manifestations of the border in art, photography and film in her excellent book *The Fence and the River*, but as her title suggests, she focuses mainly on the border as fence and river. Claire F. Fox, *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

¹⁶ See for example Edward Renehan, *The Monroe Doctrine: The Cornerstone of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Chelsea House, 2007).

¹⁷ 'Telegram from the Department of State to the Mission at the United Nations,' 1 November 1960, in *United Nations and General International Matters*, ed. John P. Glennon, vol. 2 of *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1991), 430.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 431; 430.

immediate independence.’¹⁹ The US government regularly interfered and interceded in other countries and in Latin America in particular, as part of efforts to combat global communism. Intervention in countries such as Guatemala was sold to the American public as ‘a great act of Guatemalan self-determination, a popular uprising against Communist tyranny.’²⁰ Ostensibly aimed at combating communism, these actions directly undercut the Monroe Doctrine and government arguments about the colonial menace of the Soviet Union. Under Republican President Eisenhower the US government also sought to build alliances with newly decolonised countries before Russia could move in. Richard Slotkin has argued that in order to build these connections, the US employed tactics such as financial investment, political and military intervention, as well as the practice of ‘nation-building’ which equated to actively creating an American-friendly environment.²¹ These actions and many others constituted a policy of what historian John Britton has described as ‘informal imperialism’ across the globe.²²

As William Pietz has contended, colonialism was central to critical debate and discourse during the Cold War. Pietz asserts that cold war rhetoric stood precisely as a ‘substitute for the language of colonialism.’²³ In particular, he argues that the work of George Kennan, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, and Hannah Arendt and their debates around the ‘theoretical anchor of cold war discourse’ – totalitarianism – are articulated through colonialism and therefore that their notion of totalitarianism amounts to ‘nothing other than traditional Oriental despotism plus modern police technology.’²⁴ For Pietz, one of the most significant elements of this totalitarianist discourse was its declaration of the ‘end of ideology.’²⁵ Daniel Bell’s treatise of the same name contended that the 1950s saw a ‘disconcerting caesura’ in critical thinking which rejected political ideologies and saw an absence of clear distinctions between the

¹⁹ Mark Philip Bradley, ‘Decolonization, the Global South, and the Cold War, 1919-1962,’ in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 1: Origins*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 473.

²⁰ Christian G. Appy, ‘Eisenhower’s Guatemalan Doodle, or How to Draw, Deny, and Take Credit for a Third World Coup,’ in *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1966*, ed. Christian G. Appy (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 186.

²¹ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 407.

²² John A. Britton, *Revolution and Ideology: Images of the Mexican Revolution in the United States* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 8.

²³ William Pietz, ‘The “Post-Colonialism” of Cold War Discourse,’ *Social Text* 19-20 (1988): 55. See also Booker, *Monsters*, 8-9 and M. Keith Booker, *Colonial Power, Colonial Texts: India in the Modern British Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997).

²⁴ Pietz, ‘Cold War Discourse,’ 58.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

political left and right.²⁶ Pietz finds this position analogous to Orwell's 'doublethink' that served as 'an updated version of British empiricist argumentation,' directly linking the conclusions of Bell and other scholars writing during the 1950s to the larger framework of colonial discourse which pervaded the Cold War.²⁷

This thesis will argue that the ideas and conclusions of cold war scholars such as Bell are engaged with and debated in the eight case study films I will analyse. Insofar as the many sides of the political debate on the United States' global position in the Cold War draw upon the same terms of colonial debate, they can be seen to represent the end of clearly distinct political ideologies that Bell identifies. However, this thesis will contend that despite Bell's claims, which echo US government ambitions to eradicate dissent during this period, there remains a diverse and politically multifarious output of American films that reach into Mexico in order to interrogate the United States' relationship with the wider world.

Cinematic space and postcolonialism

One of the most prevalent narrative structures in cold war border films sees Americans travelling south into Mexico to pursue romance. The formation of romantic relationships through travel to Mexico lies at the heart of the narratives of *Where Danger Lives*, *Borderline*, *Wetbacks*, *Gun Crazy*, *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947), *His Kind of Woman* (John Farrow, 1951) and more. Part one of the thesis explores the confluence of these romance narratives with romanticised imaginings of Mexican locations. Histories of romantic tourism are used to explore the connections between tourism and romanticism, and close analysis of romantic images of Mexico is used to interrogate representation and mapping as colonial practices. The romance of exotic locations which contrast with everyday sights and sites is a crucial element of what John Urry has theorised as the 'tourist gaze.' For Urry, '[s]uch practices involve the notion of "departure," of a limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one's senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane.'²⁸ Implicit in Urry's search for contrast and breaks

²⁶ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, revised ed. (New York: Free Press, 1962), 404-406.

²⁷ Pietz, 'Cold War Discourse,' 71.

²⁸ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2002), 2.

from the mundane is the need for an other to be maintained, kept fixed in place; an other which is often more traditional than modern US society. This conception of tourism positions mobile, modern viewers in opposition to static, primitive sights. Rather than using Urry's terminology of the 'tourist gaze,' which as Bronwyn Morkham and Russell Staiff argue, is reductive and collapses the relationship between different cultures, I will develop a conception of the touristic encounter through space and movement, and sites rather than sights.²⁹ Taking inspiration from Giuliana Bruno's move away from visual conceptions of viewing to one that is geographical, inhabited and mobile, tourism will be understood as a physical, spatial practice rather than a vision-based one.³⁰

Following this spatial approach to tourism, colonialism will also be analysed and interrogated through ideas of space and cartography in the case study films. As Edward Said has argued, colonialism is always a necessarily geographic phenomenon. He attests: 'To think about distant places, to colonize them, to populate or depopulate them: all of this occurs on, about, or because of land. The actual geographical possession of land is what empire in the final analysis is all about.'³¹ More precisely, and as other scholars such as Cole Harris suggest, it is the act of mapping that is one of the most powerful tools of colonisation.³² In questioning colonialism, the thesis also draws on Homi K. Bhabha's work on colonial discourses and his understanding of mobilities in relation to power relations. He argues: 'Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.'³³ Questions of motion and fixity are crucial to Bhabha's analysis, and particularly in terms of the overwriting of others through stereotypes. In its investigation of American travels in Mexico, part one of the thesis will therefore examine the ways in which cinema participates in and illuminates these geographic colonial practices. In line with Said's approach, I use 'colonialism' to refer to the physical settling and occupation of another state, and 'imperialism' to denote the processes and policies which accompany the domination of another state.³⁴ I understand both colonialism and imperialism to be 'supported and perhaps even

²⁹ Bronwyn Morkham and Russell Staiff, 'The Cinematic Tourist: Perception and Subjectivity,' in *The Tourist as a Metaphor of the Social World*, ed. Graham M. S. Dann (New York: CABI, 2002), 311, n. 1.

³⁰ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York and London: Verso, 2002).

³¹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993; repr., London: Vintage, 1994), 93.

³² Cole Harris, 'How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94 (1) (2004): 175.

³³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 66.

³⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 8.

impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination'.³⁵ As the thesis will argue, many of the case study texts exert imperialist ideologies which construct Mexico as a state requiring intercession, and at a broader level, these ideologies will also be investigated in terms of US cold war policies of intervention in Latin America.

Western genre criticism

Although the films selected as case studies fall within a variety of different genres, much work on the presence of Mexican locations in movies to date has been undertaken within the field of western scholarship.³⁶ Echoing the views of the critics writing on the border discussed above, Stanley Corkin and Christopher Frayling claim that western genre films make use of Mexican locations and scenery to foreground the United States' greatness. For these scholars, Mexico is either used as fodder for the expansion of the American nation, or as an inconsequential backdrop to the adventures of American characters.³⁷ Corkin posits that westerns made during the Cold War reflect the 'inevitability of U.S. expansion' at this time. Echoing Maciel, he argues that these films draw on the idea that America's history is imbued with manifest destiny and the right to control the entire north-American continent.³⁸ In contrast, Frayling contests that in many films 'Mexico simply provided colourful exteriors, cheap extras and a fashionably 'Third World' atmosphere.'³⁹ While Frayling rightly moves away from the idea that Mexico is used as an indicator of American expansionism, like Cortés, his argument still understands the role of Mexico as one which serves to foreground and celebrate the United States in western films.

Part two of the thesis will examine *Vera Cruz* and *Border River*, two films which are generally classified as westerns and feature border crossings, in order to challenge these critics and argue that the Mexican locations within the movies are

³⁵ Ibid., 8. Emphasis in original.

³⁶ Genre is of course a much-debated and contentious term in film scholarship, and a structuring framework which this study seeks to avoid. Genre debates are discussed in detail in chapters four and five and later in the introduction.

³⁷ See Christopher Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* (1981; repr., London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 222; Stanley Corkin, *Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and U.S. History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004) and Stanley Corkin, 'Cowboys and Free Markets: Post-World War II Westerns and U.S. Hegemony,' *Cinema Journal* 39 (3) (2000): 66-91.

³⁸ Corkin, *Cowboys*, 20.

³⁹ Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns*, 222.

indeed significant. The thesis also repositions the films outside of western genre criticism to contend that their engagement with cold war politics takes place beyond generic frameworks. In the past, much critical work on the western has drawn on the premise, taken originally from Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis,' that frontier mythology pervades cultural representations of the American west.⁴⁰ Slotkin's three-volume investigation into the frontier and American culture, *Regeneration Through Violence, The Fatal Environment, and Gunfighter Nation*, is one of the most accomplished and influential of these works.⁴¹ Peter Stanfield has highlighted this trend, and writes of work on post-Second World War westerns that 'there is a consensus that westerns do "speak" to contemporary concerns, and that this is best translated through the myth of the frontier.'⁴² While Slotkin's study of frontier mythology is hugely important, it, and the work of others which follow from it, reduces the many complexities and contradictions within the western genre to a singular mythology. Stanfield challenges the frontier mythology approach, arguing that Slotkin's formula cannot account for the diversity of western filmmaking in the 1930s.⁴³ Following Stanfield, part two of the thesis contends that frontier mythology is an equally inadequate account of the western genre in the cold war period, drawing on *Vera Cruz* and *Border River* as case studies. Rather than responding to the frontier, these films engage with their contemporary cultural contexts through questions of colonialism. Considering the films through the cinematic space of the US-Mexico border, the thesis suggests that existing accounts of the western genre in the cold war period are thus too restrictive and too narrowly focused on frontier mythology.

⁴⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History,' 1893, reprinted in *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. Everett E. Edwards (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938), 185-229.

⁴¹ For other studies of the west and the western which focus on frontier mythology see, for example, John E. O'Connor and Peter C. Rollins, eds. *Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television and History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005); Jennifer L. McMahon and B. Steve Csaki, eds., *The Philosophy of the Western* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010); Robert G. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth Century America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986); Chris Bruce, *Myth of the West* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990); Richard A. Maynard, *The American West on Film: Myth and Reality* (New Jersey: Hayden, 1974). For interpretations which question the relationship between the west and the frontier see Patricia Nelson Limerick, 'The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century,' in *The Frontier in American Culture: Essays by Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick*, ed. James Grossman (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1994), 67-102; Gary J. Hausladen, ed., *Western Places, American Myths: How We Think About the West* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2003) and William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

⁴² Peter Stanfield, *Hollywood, Westerns and the 1930s: The Lost Trail* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2001), 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

Film and politics in the Cold War

The thesis also joins a growing body of scholarship concerned with cold war culture which seeks to understand the connections between American film and politics in the 1950s. As such it engages closely with works such as Lary May's *The Big Tomorrow*, Nadel's *Containment Culture*, and Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front*.⁴⁴ Looking beyond the politics and policies which directly relate to the US-Mexico border, the wider political situation in the US in the 1950s was a complex one. With the onset of the Cold War, concerns about both external and internal communist threats were growing, culminating in the hunt for communist party members led by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). A great deal of attention was focused on Hollywood during this process, as HUAC called liberal, left-wing and communist Hollywood personnel to admit to membership of the Communist Party or to name names of those who were members. This resulted in an atmosphere of high pressure on industry personnel with many left unable to obtain work, and tight regulation of film productions by censorship bodies and studios. The prevailing culture of the 1950s is described by film historians Ronald and Allis Radosh as 'a dark period' for Hollywood, and one which May claims was 'intolerant and monolithic.' It resulted, according to Drew Casper, in the 'fear, hatred, and eradication not only of the card-carrying, the fallen-away or, as in most cases, the suspected commie, but the foreigner, the intellectual, the radical and, warming the hearts of most anti-New Dealer politicians, the liberal as well.'⁴⁵

Much scholarly attention has been paid to left-wing groups and individuals operating within the Hollywood system during the 1930s and 1940s.⁴⁶ However, when

⁴⁴ A non-exhaustive list of other titles on cold war culture includes: Appy, *Cold War Constructions*; Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); Woody Haut, *Pulp Fiction: Hardboiled Fiction and the Cold War* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995); Richard M. Fried, *The Russians are Coming! The Russians are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) and Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999).

⁴⁵ Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, *Red Star over Hollywood: The Film Colony's Long Romance with the Left* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005), 207; Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2; Drew Casper, *Postwar Hollywood, 1946-1962* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 5.

⁴⁶ In addition to the works mentioned in the text, see also Paul Buhle and David Wagner, *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Lincoln Polonsky and the Hollywood Left* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2001); Bob Hertzberg, *The Left Side of the Screen: Communist and Left-Wing Ideology in Hollywood, 1929-2009* (Jefferson and London: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011); Frank Krutnik et al., eds., *'Un-American' Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era*

it comes to the 1950s, much of this work argues that this vibrant left-wing culture was quashed as Hollywood came under the spotlight of communist investigations, leading studios to ensure that their movies were at least banal if not virulently anti-communist in stance. For example, while Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner argue persuasively that film was a crucial vehicle for the communication of leftist politics from the Depression onwards, they also assert that this politicised period of Hollywood's history ended in the early 1950s.⁴⁷ At this time, they claim, 'the gatekeepers slammed the gates shut,' apparently precluding the production of any left or liberal films after this period.⁴⁸

Similarly, both Nadel and Casper contend that the 1950s saw the production of movies which were largely apolitical and simply reflected the position of the US government. Both critics emphasise that leftist movements fell away during the Cold War as society coalesced behind a new, more homogenous, political consensus. Casper contends that 'any deviation from Cold War orthodoxy' during this period was 'highly problematic.'⁴⁹ While for Nadel's model of containment culture, the 1950s bore witness to cultural texts which served simply to 'repeat or modify the narrative that unifies the sexual, political, and economic aspects of containment,' before the emergence of more subversive forms in the 1960s.⁵⁰ Historian John Fousek also supports the notion that during the 1950s political consensus reigned in the US. Fousek argues that cold war rhetoric pitted the US against the communist threat from Russia and championed capitalist society in expressly American terms. He claims that it was therefore through a specifically 'American nationalist ideology' that the left and right came together in this period.⁵¹

Conversely, other scholars have begun to identify moments of radical politics which persevere into the 1950s. May finds potentially subversive challenges to the political consensus within film noir and teen rebellion movies, which, he argues, grew

(Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2007) and Larry Ceplair, 'The Film Industry's Battle Against Left-Wing Influences, from the Russian Revolution to the Blacklist,' *Film History* 20 (4) (2008): 399-411. Specifically on the HUAC investigations in Hollywood see Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics and the Film Community, 1930-1960* (1980; repr., Berkley and London: University of California Press, 1983); M. Keith Booker, *From Box Office to Ballot Box: The American Political Film* (Westport: Praeger, 2007) and John Joseph Gladchuk, *Hollywood and Anticommunism: HUAC and the Evolution of the Red Menace, 1935-1950* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴⁷ Buhle and Wagner, *Radical Hollywood: The Untold Story Behind America's Favorite Movies* (New York: New Press, 2002), xvii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁴⁹ Casper, *Postwar Hollywood*, 5.

⁵⁰ Nadel, *Containment Culture*, 6.

⁵¹ John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

into the more outspokenly countercultural filmmaking of the 1960s.⁵² Denning too charts fractures in the supposed political consensus, arguing that the broad left-wing movement known as the popular front remained a divided entity into the mid-century period with many different elements working outside and against the political consensus. Denning asserts that ‘the communisms of the depression triggered a deep and lasting transformation of American modernism and mass culture’ which, rather than simply evaporating during the Cold War, persisted through the 1950s and beyond.⁵³ As an intriguing counterpoint to Fousek’s claims that political consensus was framed in American nationalist terms, Denning argues that the popular front actively celebrated connections between the US and the rest of the world, and between different ethnicities within the country.⁵⁴ This resistance to the consensus was thus a multicultural one, which looked both outside of the United States and within it to build an inclusive, heterogeneous identity. For the left, Denning claims,

the romance of revolution was manifested not only in the popularity of the Soviet films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, but also in the romance of the Mexican revolution, embodied in the grand murals of Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, the novels of B. Traven, and the films *Juarez* and *Viva Zapata*. The success of the Popular Front politics of international solidarity lay in the ability of these narratives to displace the imperial fantasies of race war that dominated American popular culture.⁵⁵

Mexico thus began to play an important role within the leftist movement’s international solidarity and multicultural identity. The images of Mexican revolutionaries popularised by Rivera, Orozco and other muralists were echoed in Hollywood movies, creating an indelible link between left-wing politics and Mexican revolution that would persist within American cinema throughout the twentieth century. Further, as Rebecca Schreiber has argued, Mexico provided an important safe haven for many communist and left-wing artists and filmmakers fleeing persecution in the US during the HUAC investigations.⁵⁶ Thus Mexico played a vitally important role in the cultural imaginary of the American left during this period, and occupied a central position in the country’s political imagination more broadly.

⁵² See May, *Big Tomorrow*, chapter six.

⁵³ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1997; repr., London and New York: Verso, 2010), xvi.

⁵⁴ Fousek, *Free World*, 2.

⁵⁵ Denning, *Cultural Front*, 12-13.

⁵⁶ Rebecca M. Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico: U.S. Dissidents and the Culture of Resistance* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), ix-xii.

It is this thesis' assertion that cinematic images of the US-Mexico border enact a diverse range of positions across the political spectrum, including left and liberal politics. Rather than viewing the 1950s as a period of benign, 'escapist and sentimental' films, through close analysis of the ways in which images of the border and Mexico are used, I argue that the 1950s did indeed see a body of political films which use the US-Mexico border to articulate questions about the United States' position in the cold war world.⁵⁷ Building on the work of May and Denning which traces the persistence of left-wing politics and filmmaking through this period, this thesis challenges the idea that filmmaking in the fifties was solely geared toward building political consensus and reflecting the hegemonic position of the US government. Part three of the thesis explores the political relationship between filmmakers and the content of these border films further, both through the themes of regulation which pervade the texts, and in exploring the forms of political and cultural regulation that the productions were party to. Connections between regulation and mobility will be of central importance to the analysis of the way the films present power and politics. Ideas of regulation and mobility also inform the political movements which are central to their narratives and play important roles in their production contexts.⁵⁸

Of course no cultural text can be reduced to a single simple political position, and it is certainly not the aim of this thesis to label particular films as left-wing, liberal, radical or conservative. Rather, taking into consideration the complex and contradictory politics of these texts, I will question how multiple influences including filmmakers' stated personal political positions may have impacted on films and will track political tensions within representations of colonialism at the border. In doing so, I seek to emphasise the plurality and diversity of political reactions to American cold war policies which are articulated through the US-Mexico border. I make use of terms such as 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' but I do not seek to flatten the politics of these films or their filmmakers into simple binaries, but to emphasise the fact that each text presents a complex, contradictory and different politics. Indeed, as Richard Pells has argued, during the 1950s 'the terms liberal and conservative had already begun to shed whatever precise political meanings they might have once possessed.'⁵⁹ In using this terminology

⁵⁷ Radosh and Radosh, *Red Star*, viii.

⁵⁸ In this approach, the thesis draws on the concept of mobility as developed particularly by Urry and Peter Adey. See John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007) and Peter Adey, *Mobility* (London: Routledge, 2010). Chapter six elaborates on theories of mobility in relation to regulation further.

⁵⁹ Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*, 2nd ed. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), vii.

I wish to evoke the historical slippage of such labels, but nevertheless to indicate the broad positioning of people and films discussed within the political continuum and to emphasise the differences between their ideologies.

Cold war cinema and genre

The wider implications for this study relate not just to theories of space and postcolonialism, but also to the ways in which the Cold War has been understood in American culture. If, as this thesis will argue, the cinematic space of the border can tell us important things about the way in which colonialism operated in the Cold War, then this provides a new way of looking at cold war screen culture outside of the generic frameworks which dominate current critical work on the period.⁶⁰ For example, in his study of the cold war period, Booker argues that ‘the science fiction of the long 1950s, in both novel and film, closely parallels the social criticism of the decade in the terms of its critique of American society’.⁶¹ Other generic forms of cultural texts are not considered in the study. Similarly, Peter Lev claims that at this time ‘critical social commentary was largely limited to indirect expressions in adventure genres such as the western and science fiction.’⁶² Cynthia Hendershot’s *I Was a Cold War Monster* likewise focuses solely on horror films and the ways in which the ‘real monsters’ of the Cold War ‘found cinematic expression in the monsters of horror film.’⁶³ In addition, Corkin’s *Cowboys as Cold Warriors* centres on the relationship between westerns and the Cold War, claiming that it is western films that ‘metaphorically narrate the relationship between the United States and the world.’⁶⁴ Further, much work on film noir is concerned with the genre’s connection to cold war culture. For example, William Luhr argues that the Cold War, alongside the Depression and Second World

⁶⁰ The vast majority of critical work on Hollywood cinema and American culture more generally during the Cold War focuses on specific genres. See for example, Mark Jancovich, *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Cynthia Hendershot, *Paranoia, the Bomb and 1950s Science Fiction Films* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999); David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) and Corkin, *Cowboys*. Notable exceptions include Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988) and Nadel, *Containment Culture*, works which cut across generic frameworks.

⁶¹ Booker, *Monsters*, 16.

⁶² Peter Lev, *The Fifties: Transforming the Screen, 1950-1959* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2003), 63.

⁶³ Cynthia Hendershot, *I Was a Cold War Monster: Horror Films, Eroticism, and the Cold War Imagination* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2001), 1.

⁶⁴ Corkin, *Cowboys*, 3.

War, form the three central ‘historical traumas’ which ‘pervade’ the ‘sensibility’ of these films.⁶⁵

By removing my case study films from their generic contexts and considering them instead through their cinematic locations, this thesis therefore provides an alternative approach to considering American cold war culture. Following Pamela Robertson Wojcik, it seeks to use cinematic space to interrogate existing generic criticism and structures, and to ‘attend to the spatial dynamics of... films and consider whether and how space sets the parameters for the plot, themes and ideology of not only individual films but also genres.’⁶⁶ The thesis will argue that this approach establishes an important contribution to understandings of the cold war period through investigating what a particular cinematic space can tell us about its political, cultural and historical contexts. It understands genres to be, as Rick Altman has contended, ‘not just discursive but, because they are mechanisms for co-ordinating diverse users, multi-discursive. Instead of utilizing a single master language... a genre may appropriately be considered multi-coded,’ comprising different, overlapping definitions and assignments according to different historical periods and different users.⁶⁷ In considering films outside of their established generic frameworks, the thesis therefore seeks to question, contest and expand ideas about genre in cold war cinema, rather than to categorise or classify.

At the broadest level, the thesis is concerned with the relationship between films and their political and historical contexts. Scholars have developed many different approaches to tackle this complex and changing relationship. James Combs suggests that the overarching aim of studies of film and politics should be ‘the interpretation of movies in the historical context in which they emerged and also how in ways we do not fully understand, they “participated.”’⁶⁸ While the situating of films within their original historical contexts forms an important part of my study, Combs’ concomitant insistence on searching for ‘the “truth” that [movies] might reveal, often quite unwittingly, about the political time in which they appeared,’ is a simplification of the ways in the medium interacts with the world.⁶⁹ As Philip Davies and Brian Neve write

⁶⁵ William Luhr, *Film Noir* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 70.

⁶⁶ Pamela Robertson Wojcik, *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945-1975* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 8.

⁶⁷ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 208.

⁶⁸ James Combs, ‘Understanding the Politics of Movies,’ in *Movies and Politics: The Dynamic Relationship*, ed. James Combs (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993), 4.

⁶⁹ Combs, ‘Politics of Movies,’ 4.

in their introduction to the volume *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*, '[t]he lines of influence between film and society are by no means easy to draw.'⁷⁰ Davies and Neve find that scholars' positions on this point vary widely from 'conceptions of Hollywood as essentially manipulative' to 'those which see stars and themes as direct responses to popular wishes and desires.'⁷¹ This thesis certainly moves away from an interpretation of movies as conduits for the transmission of political messages, but it does acknowledge that the personnel and processes involved in the production of a film have profound collective effects on it. Starting from the assumption that films are collaborative cultural products, I understand movies to be influenced both by the whole team involved in their making, and by their contemporary political, historical and cultural contexts. I further contend that films do not just respond to their contexts but are also implicated in the production and construction of them. Falling somewhere in the middle of Davis and Neve's scale, in the thesis I am interested in filmmakers' individual political positions as well as wider contemporary political and cultural attitudes.

Methodologies

This thesis undertakes a textual and contextual analysis of eight border films made in the United States in the period 1949 to 1958. In incorporating textual and historical approaches, it uses the films as case studies to build an understanding of the ways in which contemporary American culture interacted, used and engaged with the US-Mexico border. The films were chosen to reflect a variety of genres, and include both lesser- and well-known titles. *Borderline*, *Border River*, *Wetbacks*, and *The Tijuana Story* were chosen specifically because there is little existing critical work on them and they represent types of cinema (categorised as B-movies and low-value productions) that are often marginalised within film studies. *Border Incident*, *Where Danger Lives*, *Vera Cruz*, and *Touch of Evil* were selected because little criticism exists which considers these films outside of auteur studies or the generic contexts of film noir and westerns.⁷² It aims to undertake a cultural history of the US-Mexico border during the peak cold war period through the films which make use of this cinematic space to

⁷⁰ Philip Davies and Brian Neve, 'Introduction,' in *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*, ed. Philip Davies and Brian Neve (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷² See individual chapters for full discussions of existing critical work on these films.

investigate what the border meant within American culture. Although I challenge the simplification of representations of the American west to a single frontier mythology in Slotkin's work, I nevertheless take inspiration from his methodological approach to cultural history. Following Slotkin the thesis therefore aims to enact an interrogation of 'the mythic expression of ideology' extant in film and other cultural texts in order to 'construct a historical account of the development of *meaning*.'⁷³

In line with a research project which is focused on the representation of a particular space, my close textual work on these films has a literal, spatial and geographic focus in both visual and narrative analysis. Drawing on the scholarship of cultural geographers such as Peter Jackson, the thesis begins from the premise that analysing a particular space can reveal information about a culture; in Jackson's words, it understands that 'culture is *spatially constituted*'.⁷⁴ In my close textual analysis of the cinematic space of the films, I am interested in features such as the appearance and layout of buildings within a scene, the positioning of structures in the background of a shot, or equally the way in which the camera moves around a space. In this way my work owes a clear methodological debt to film scholars Bruno and Tom Conley and their explicitly physical and geographic approach to textual analysis of film.⁷⁵ Bruno's filmic 'voyageur,' as a challenge to the traditional voyeur of film studies, has guided me through the places and spaces of the cinematic border, where this thesis explores (in a physical, spatial sense) the cinematic sites within the frame.⁷⁶

Conley's assertion that 'maps appear in most of the movies we see' informs my analysis of the cartography of the cinematic border.⁷⁷ His claim that 'a map in a film is an element at once foreign to the film but also, paradoxically, of the same essence as film,' is a position which echoes through the thesis as it investigates the ways in which cinema works to map out the border.⁷⁸ In this approach, I am also inspired by Edward Soja's notion of 'Thirdspace' and hope to contribute to the broader project of investigating the 'simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical,

⁷³ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 5. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁴ Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography* (1989; repr., London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 3. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁵ See Bruno, *Atlas* and Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁷⁶ Bruno, *Atlas*, 16. One of the few texts written about the border which has a specifically spatial focus is Lawrence Arthur Herzog's *Where North Meets South: Cities, Space and Politics on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas, 1990).

⁷⁷ Conley, *Cartographic Cinema*, 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence.’⁷⁹ Soja’s ‘Thirdspace’ also speaks to marginality and of the process of ‘*restructuring* that draws selectively and strategically from...two opposing categories to open new alternatives.’⁸⁰ In focusing specifically on the borderline between the United States and Mexico, here I too hope to open new alternatives and approaches from a space in-between.

This spatially-focused textual analysis is combined with postcolonial approaches to discourse analysis, drawing in particular on Said’s work on ‘Orientalism’ in order to comprehend the ways in which American images of Mexico operate.⁸¹ Notwithstanding criticism levelled against *Orientalism* for over-simplifying and reinforcing the binary oppositions his text seeks to identify and question, key elements of Said’s argument remain of use in examining the relationship between different cultures.⁸² Said argues that Orientalism, the process by which western countries distinguished between the Orient and Occident, ‘responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West.’⁸³ Building on this premise, the thesis understands the cinematic images of Mexico and the border as responding to the culture that produced them, rather than bearing a direct relation to any ‘real’ border or Mexico, and as active participants in the production of the spaces and cultures that they represent. Conceptualising the US and Mexico as ‘imagined communities,’ I am therefore concerned with the ways in which the United States imagines itself through images of the border and Mexico.⁸⁴ I assert that film is one of the key forms in which this cultural imagining takes place and that in order to understand what the border means, both today and historically, we must interrogate the history and legacy of the cinematic border.

Alongside textual analysis, the thesis will attempt to resituate the films within some of their original cultural, political and historical contexts in order to better appreciate the significance they may have held within their contemporary cultures.

⁷⁹ Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; repr., London: Penguin, 2003).

⁸² For example, Dennis Porter argues that Said ‘fails to historicize adequately the texts he cites and summarizes, finding always the same triumphant discourse when frequently several are in conflict.’ Dennis Porter, ‘Orientalism and its Problems,’ in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 160. Bhabha too criticises *Orientalism*, claiming that the book retains a binary opposition that separates knowledge and that power and misuses Foucault on this subject. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 72.

⁸³ Said, *Orientalism*, 22.

⁸⁴ The idea of a nation as an ‘imagined political community’ is of course taken from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), 6.

Primary research into newspapers, magazines and other commentary is undertaken in publications including the *New York Times*, the *LA Mirror* and *Life* magazine. This research is combined with a range of secondary historical sources to build up a picture of the environment in which these films were produced.⁸⁵ Of course when undertaking historical research the lens of the present can never be fully escaped, and this contextual approach will inevitably construct just one of many possible arguments about what the role and function of the US-Mexico border was in cinema at this time. Research into the contemporary critical reception of films is conducted in newspapers, trade press and fan publications such as *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and the *Motion Picture Herald*, and is focused on commentary around the representation of Mexico and the generic classifications assigned to the films.⁸⁶ The personal politics of key members of cast and crew are also investigated through magazine and newspaper interviews, biographies and autobiographies in order to examine the impact that individual filmmakers may have had on the movies. In terms of authorship, films are here understood as cultural artefacts, produced through a collaborative process in which contemporary society at large leaves as significant an imprint on movies as any individual filmmaker involved in them. Therefore, special attention is paid to attempting to contextualise the movies through an understanding of that contemporary culture, which complements and counterpoints research into individual filmmakers' personal and political positions.

Combining textual and contextual work, this two-strand method of analysis looks to the borderline and marginal zones of films in order to destabilise their narratives and explore the political implications therein. This deconstructive approach understands that all texts are inherently contradictory and, following Jacques Derrida, that small, marginal details always already present within the text can unhinge the whole at any moment.⁸⁷ For instance, the thesis considers the implications of signs and

⁸⁵ The newspaper primarily used is the *New York Times*. As one of the leading national newspapers in terms of both circulation figures and prestige, the *Times* held a highly influential position in the US during this period. As Donald Shaw and Charles McKenzie argue, in addition to priding itself on printing 'all the news that is fit to print,' the *Times* served the 'normative role of establishing news agendas for both [its] communities and the nation – and for television networks and national magazines.' Donald Shaw and Charles McKenzie, 'American Daily Newspaper Evolution: Past, Present...and Future,' in *The Function of Newspapers in Society: A Global Perspective*, ed. Shannon E. Martin and David A. Copeland (Westport and London: Praeger, 2003), 140.

⁸⁶ Although I primarily use US publications, UK reviews and commentary are also sometimes consulted, as they offer easily accessible and insightful analyses of the films and reflect the increasing interconnectedness of US and UK culture and media environments at this time.

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), see for example 24.

billboards in the background of the filmic space for representations of American tourism. It also questions, for example, the impact that Ricardo Montalban's involvement in the Chicano civil rights movement may have had on the construction of his star persona both within films and in the press. Although tiny details in the background of shots and small fragments of biographical information may appear to be marginal concerns, they can offer new perspectives and entirely reframe our understanding of films.

Using border crossings as a starting point, the thesis is methodologically informed by Bhabha's assertion that 'it is the "inter" – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the "people".'⁸⁸ For Bhabha it is only possible to escape the reproduction of existing power structures in discussions of cultural difference through working from in-between spaces and borderlines: 'the boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing*'.⁸⁹ In beginning from the border, this thesis seeks to interrogate the ways in the cinematic boundary was used during the cold war period, as well as to question the ways in which cold war culture has been defined by critics and the concomitant policing of genre in studies of cold war film. Questioning the value judgements and politics behind extant generic studies of the period and traditional genre studies more broadly, working from the boundary becomes a political act which hopes not to simply reproduce dominant power relations but to productively trouble them and open up wider possibilities. In this way, the thesis hopes to sit at the crossroads between studies of cinematic space and political film history.

The borderline is referred to throughout the text as the 'US-Mexico border.' Of course this is incorrect as the boundary is just as much the 'Mexico-US border,' but because my project only focuses on American images of the border, I have stuck with the name given to the dividing line that is used in the American films studied. Due to limitations of size, my original plan to investigate both American and Mexican films which charted border crossings had to be reduced, as US representations of the border alone proved to be a large, complex and intriguing area of study. I hope that by contributing to developing understanding of the ways in which Mexico and Mexicans have been represented within the US I begin to mitigate my silencing of the voices of

⁸⁸ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 38-39.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5, emphasis in original.

Mexican filmmakers here. Borrowing Jeffrey Geiger's approach, I avoid using 'America' as a noun because it seems to casually appropriate the whole continent, instead referring to the country as the 'United States.' But I make use of the adjective 'American' precisely because, as Geiger argues, it 'indicat[es] a powerful idea – and hegemonic construct... – of national identity.'⁹⁰

Two other major fields of study with which this thesis intersects are Chicano studies, the area of scholarship arising out of the Mexican-American civil rights movement which emerged during the 1950s and 1960s, and Chicana/o studies which coalesced around Gloria Anzaldúa's ground-breaking *Borderlands/La Frontera* published in 1987.⁹¹ While these areas of scholarship are drawn upon and engaged with throughout the thesis, the historical nature of this project means that it is largely focused on the hegemonic social, cultural and critical approaches of the cold war period. Some of the many complex themes and debates of Chicana/o studies will therefore be considered in more detail in the conclusion to the thesis, which considers the implications of this study for today's understandings of the border within the United States and Mexico.

Plotting a route

The thesis is divided into three parts which focus on the themes of romance, revolution and regulation, while issues of colonialism, genre and cold war politics thread through and across these thematic divides. The first part of the thesis centres on the representation of Mexico as a romanticised and romantic site. Close textual analysis

⁹⁰ Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 1. As Geiger notes, alternative approaches to the use of 'America' are also offered by Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) and Mary A. Renda, *Taking Tahiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁹¹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987). On the Chicano and Chicana/o movements see, for example, David R. Maciel and Isidro D. Ortiz, eds., *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads*; Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, ed., *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006); Rodolfo F. Acuña, *The Making of Chicana/o Studies: In the Trenches of Academe* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera, *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1993). Specifically on Chicano and Chicana/o studies and film, see Chon A. Noriega, ed., *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Chon A. Noriega, ed., *Visible Nations: Latin American Cinema and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Frederick Luis Aldama, *Brown on Brown: Chicano/a Representations of Gender, Sexuality, and Ethnicity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005) and Rosa Linda Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano Film Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

of the ways in which border crossings physically manifest in cinematic space is used to argue that these representations of Mexico engage explicitly with questions of the United States' imperial relationship with the country. Chapter one analyses *Where Danger Lives* and considers the movie in the context of a wider cycle of films which dramatise escapes from the US into Mexico at this time. Through exploring the history of romantic travel, this chapter investigates the practice of tourism, positing a mobile and moving tourist encounter. Chapter two focuses on *Borderline*. It argues that while crossing the border into Mexico enables the film's American protagonists to playfully perform different identities as they travel the country, it also calls into question the practice of ethnic passing in Hollywood and the film industry's flexible approach to ethnicity at this time. The third chapter centres on *Wetbacks* in order to analyse the depiction of Mexico as an exotic location, and investigates the associations between American tourism and Mexico. This chapter argues that in overwriting Mexican terrain with American exoticism, *Wetbacks* foregrounds the imperial processes at the heart of the romanticisation of Mexico.

Part two of the thesis considers the importance of revolution in American visions of the US-Mexico border. Taking as its focus two films most often classified as westerns, this section challenges accounts of cold war cinema which focus on genre by analysing these films outside of western genre frameworks. Chapter four examines *Vera Cruz* and its representation of individualism and collectivism to argue that it responds not to a western frontier mythology, but rather to ideas of revolution and radical politics. The chapter explores the connections between the film's cinematic Mexican spaces, its political positioning, and its understanding of the US-Mexico relationship. Chapter five continues with this theme and uses *Border River* to interrogate existing academic work on the frontier and cold war culture, arguing that questions of space and territory are linked directly to colonialism in the film. The positioning of gender in frontier studies and western genre criticism is also analysed, and the chapter argues that the politicisation of Mexican female characters in *Border River* and other revolution films lends them a centrality not often recognised in films of this style and period.

The final part of the thesis focuses on the theme of regulation and is particularly interested in the regulation of movements, both physical and political. In coupling brief production and industrial histories with textual analysis, this part of the thesis investigates the politics of films as well as the industry regulation that they may have

faced. It argues that despite the ostensible political consensus of the Cold War, the involvement of key left-wing Hollywood personnel in many of the case study films suggests that the US-Mexico border served as a space which enabled the articulation of dissenting politics and a broad spectrum of heterogeneous ideologies. Chapter six focuses on *Border Incident* and its dramatisation of the policing of the border and Mexican migrants, arguing that it is through the theme of regulation that the film challenges labour practices in the US. The migrants are controlled and dominated through their lack of freedom of movement, and the chapter considers the connections between political and physical mobility. Chapter seven examines *The Tijuana Story*'s depiction of the border city of Tijuana and argues that the film challenges prevailing cinematic visions of the city through deliberately fragmenting and fragmented perspectives. The chapter thus contends that the cinematic city can form a vital space of postcolonial resistance. The final chapter analyses *Touch of Evil*, arguing that it must be seen in the context of this entire series of border films rather than as a standalone Wellesian masterpiece. Focusing on the representation of stasis and movement, the chapter asks what space and mobility might reveal about the film's production of identity, its politics and its construction of the United States as an imperial influence in Mexico.

Ideas of movement and stasis will be important across all of the chapters of the thesis, and will thread through the three sections on romance, revolution and regulation. Inextricably linked to imperialism, political movements and power, this focus on mobility thus feeds into the thesis' central argument that the international boundary is produced as a site through which concerns about the United States' place in the cold war world are articulated. Further, border crossing will become a methodological practice as the thesis crosses outside of established generic boundaries to argue that the connections between cinema and the Cold War are not determined by genre. The conclusion to the thesis reflects on these issues further and briefly considers the implications of this study for the future of the cinematic border.

PART ONE

Romance: Tourists, Lawbreakers and Undercover Cops

Chapter One

The Romance of Mexico: Tourists, Fugitives and Escaping the US in *Where Danger Lives* (1950)

Margo Lannington's plan to escape across the border into Mexico forms the central narrative thrust in John Farrow's 1950 film, *Where Danger Lives*. Played by Faith Domergue, Lannington's romantic dream of Mexico pervades the whole film, and indeed her whole back-story, as the film reveals that she has spent years sending money to a bank in Mexico City in preparation for her departure. This dream motivates her to pursue the charming Dr Jeff Cameron (Robert Mitchum) and persuade him to start a new life with her south of the border. However, she is not drawn to Mexico solely for touristic reasons. Lannington is also on the run from American police and Cameron becomes entwined in her criminal plot as she murders her older husband in such a way as to make the young doctor believe he is the culprit. As they drive south towards the border the couple take on disguises, pretending to be runaway lovers on their way to be married secretly in Mexico. Playing both tourists and fugitives in the film, Lannington and Cameron are drawn to Mexico for touristic and criminal reasons. This chapter explores the nature of the romantic lure of Mexico within American culture, and argues that for *Where Danger Lives*, the romance of Mexico lies in the fact that its touristic attractions are also aligned with an escape from American law and order.

As outlined in the introduction, this first part of the thesis is entitled 'romance' and argues that one of the important ways in which Mexico functions in these border films is as a romanticised and romantic destination for American travellers. Romance has always been integral to tourism, and it was during the Romantic period that tourism was first popularised and extensively written about. Although many critics draw clear lines of influence between romanticism and tourism, the particular characteristics of romantic tourism have been debated widely. Patricia Jasen attests that 'romanticism's association between images, commodities, feelings, and personal fulfilment was a vital contributing factor to the development of... the tourist industry.'⁹² For Amanda Gilroy, romantic tourism was characterised by a 'fascination with... exotic topography and

⁹² Patricia Jane Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 11.

racial others' and offered 'access to imaginary spaces of personal liberation and medicine for the troubled mind.'⁹³ While George Dekker argues that touristic romanticism was inextricably linked to the literary form, claiming 'Romantic tourists and novelists shared an aesthetic that effectively defined both tour and novel as privileged spaces exempt from the boring routines and hampering contingencies of ordinary life and rich with opportunities for imaginative transport.'⁹⁴ The first part of the thesis uses such notions of romantic tourism to investigate the connections between romanticised cinematic representations of Mexico and American tourism to the country during the Cold War. As in these notions of romantic tourism, in border crossing films of the Cold War, the romance of travelling to Mexico is connected to the expansion of consumer culture and commodification. Exoticism and primitivism are also important features, as is the potential for imaginary liberation and the constitution of identity for American travellers. Through their concern with tourism, these border films become touristic acts which use ideas of romance to depict the relationship between the US and Mexico as an imperial one.

The late 1940s and early 1950s saw the production of a series of films which were specifically concerned with the attempts of Americans to escape across the US-Mexico border, beginning with 1947's *Out of the Past*. In 1950 *Where Danger Lives* followed hot on the heels of *Gun Crazy*, and later *His Kind of Woman* (1951) and *The Fast and the Furious* (John Ireland, 1954) continued the trend. In each of these films, US protagonists wanted by the police decide to flee to the Mexican border, and their journeys take on both romantic and fugitive imperatives. For example, *Out of the Past* sees its male protagonist Jeff Markham (Mitchum) head to Mexico to track down Kathy (Jane Greer) who has fled south of the border to escape her partner. They do not just become fugitives on the run together, but also a romantic couple enjoying the exotic Mexican scenery.

This chapter focuses on the depiction of Mexico as an escape from the United States and uses *Where Danger Lives* as its case study, arguing that Mexico takes on a mythic romanticism in the film through which its status as tourist destination and fugitive sanctuary become entwined. In this way, the film also recalls the journeys of American cold war exiles, many of whom sought refuge from communist investigations

⁹³ Amanda Gilroy, 'Introduction,' in *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel, 1775-1844*, ed. Amanda Gilroy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 2.

⁹⁴ George Dekker, *The Fictions of Romantic Tourism: Radcliffe, Scott and Mary Shelley* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 3.

south of the border. This chapter contends that the romance of Mexico during this period therefore lies in the connections between exoticism, lawlessness and political freedom. The first section of the chapter explores the history of escapes to Mexico, arguing that fugitive, touristic and political flights south of the border are closely related through American cultural mythologies of the romance of Mexico. Drawing on historical newspaper reports and articles it analyses the discourses which circulated around travel to Mexico in these different forms, and it develops an understanding of touristic encounters as spatial and mobile in nature. The second section of the chapter focuses on the connections between the automobile, road narratives and travel to Mexico. It combines close analysis of the narrative structure and visual representation of automobile travel in *Where Danger Lives* with research into the cultural significance of motor vehicles at this time, and argues that for this film, Mexico's draw is also bound up with the romance of the road. The chapter's final section uses the idea of travelling identities to analyse the connections between touristic and romantic encounters in *Where Danger Lives*. As for many of the other border escape films produced during this period, the romance of Mexico is related to romantic relationships between the characters. In the 1950s, the romantic lure of Mexico appealed to tourists, fugitives and political exiles alike. Through the close connections between the protagonists' love story and Mexico's own romance, issues of colonialism are called to the fore in *Where Danger Lives*.

The chapter uses the idea of mythology to investigate the ways in which the romance of Mexico manifests. Drawing on Richard Slotkin's approach, it understands myths as 'stories drawn from a society's history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness – with all the complexities and contradictions that consciousness may contain.'⁹⁵ In *Where Danger Lives*, as for the other films examined in this thesis, the border operates as what Mary Louise Pratt has described as a 'contact zone,' or 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.'⁹⁶ Although much important critical work has considered the significance of border crossers who travel

⁹⁵ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 5. In this approach, my methodology also draws more broadly on Roland Barthes' approach in *Mythologies*, in seeking to understand the 'naturalness' and 'falsely obvious' construction of cinematic images of the border and Mexico. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (1957; repr., London: Vintage, 2009), xix.

⁹⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

north from Mexico into the US, far less has been written about those who head south.⁹⁷ Many of the later chapters in this thesis consider the importance of the border in terms of Mexican migration northwards, but this chapter and the two that follow focus specifically on American journeys to Mexico. *Where Danger Lives* is considered in this light in part because it is a film which has previously received critical attention only through generic and psychoanalytical perspectives.⁹⁸ In thinking about *Where Danger Lives* as a cold war film through the spaces of the US-Mexico border I therefore hope to offer new perspectives on the film.

Escaping the United States: fugitives, tourists and politics

Since the establishment of its current position in the mid-nineteenth century, the US-Mexico border has continuously functioned as a symbol of escape from American rules and laws.⁹⁹ By the 1850s, it is estimated that over 4,000 slaves had fled across the border from the US south into Mexico where slavery was outlawed and no extradition treaty was in place.¹⁰⁰ Later, the Civil War saw many Confederate officers escape into Mexico to avoid imprisonment. Perhaps the most famous border escapee was Mexican revolutionary leader Pancho Villa, who fled south into Mexico after an incursion into Columbus, New Mexico, managing to evade capture by US cavalry under the command of General John Pershing.¹⁰¹ Although modern American media often depicts only Mexican wrong-doers fleeing across the border to safety, in reality, as Steven Bender has argued, the US-Mexico border has served as a route of escape as much for US

⁹⁷ Steven Bender's *Run for the Border: Vice and Virtue in U.S.-Mexico Border Crossings* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012) investigates border crossings in both directions, as does Thomas Torrans' *The Magic Curtain: The Mexican-American Border in Fiction, Film, and Song* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2002).

⁹⁸ For examples of such analyses see Dominique Mainon and James Ursini, *Cinema of Obsession: Erotic Fixation and Love Gone Wrong in the Movies* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2007), 128-130; Geoff Mayer and Brian McDonnell, *Encyclopedia of Film Noir* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2007), 435-437 and Steve Jenkins, Rev. of *Where Danger Lives*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 48 (571) (1981): 166-167.

⁹⁹ The 1819 Adams-Onís treaty between Spain and the United States established that Texas, California and New Mexico belonged to the Spanish Empire. This treaty was ratified in 1831, and in 1836 Texas won independence from Mexico, to be later annexed by the US in 1845. Following the 1848 treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which ended the US-Mexican war, Mexico was forced to sell around a third of its land to the United States. In 1853, the US made a further purchase and together the area bought by the US comprised all of the land known today as California, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Arizona as well as parts of Wyoming and Colorado. Chapter two considers the history of the mapping of the borderline in more detail. See also John Davenport, *The U.S.-Mexico Border: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*, foreword by Senator George J. Mitchell (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ Bender, *Run for the Border*, 13.

¹⁰¹ For a clear assessment of the US's changing relationship with Villa see Britton, *Revolution*, 177-178.

citizens as for Mexicans and people of other nationalities.¹⁰² In film too, the boundary has regularly been presented as a place of escape for Mexicans and Americans alike since the beginning of the twentieth century. Early pictures such as *Mixed Blood* (Charles Swickard, 1916) show both US and Mexican characters fleeing to the border to escape retribution, and 1935's movie *Bordertown* (Archie Mayo) tells the story of Mexican-American Juan/Johnny Ramírez, who when being pursued on charges of murder, has no option but to head across the border into Mexico.¹⁰³

While early border films were filled with tales of fugitives trying to escape law and order by heading south of the boundary, by the 1950s the United States was also becoming increasingly obsessed with travelling to Mexico on vacation. This period saw a huge rise in American travel to Mexico. Newspapers describe an 'amazing tourist boom' beginning in 1950, with more than half a million tourists crossing the border a year.¹⁰⁴ The explosion in journeys south across the international divide was in no small part due to the fact that Mexican holiday resorts began to be advertised to the general public at this time. Newspaper articles such as 'Pesos go Farther at Story-Book Acapulco' and 'Acapulco – Resort City for Budgeteers' emphasised that exotic resorts 'no longer should be considered exclusively the playground for those with unlimited funds.'¹⁰⁵ The inauguration of the Pan-American Highway also played a key role in opening up Mexico to ordinary Americans. The then-748 mile highway was hailed as 'the only paved road reaching deep into Mexico,' which enabled the holiday to start 'the moment the border is crossed.'¹⁰⁶

Alongside the huge numbers of American tourists heading south, another large group of border crossers during this period were the many US artists, writers and filmmakers who sought political refuge in Mexico. Mexico City was the destination of choice for many communists, liberals and left-wingers seeking to avoid prosecution in the US, and newspapers often featured headlines about the need to close the border to

¹⁰² See Bender, *Run for the Border*, chapter one.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Rupert Gresham, 'Drive on to Mexico: More than Half Million Tourists Crossing the Border Annually,' *New York Times*, 15 April 1951, 265.

¹⁰⁵ Quotation taken from William G. Preston, 'Pesos Go Farther at Story-Book Acapulco,' *New York Times*, 21 November 1948, 15. See also Bernadine Bailey, 'Acapulco – Resort City for Budgeteers, Too,' *New York Times*, 26 October 1958, 37.

¹⁰⁶ Edward Wood, 'Motoring in Mexico: Three-Day Trip from Texas to Mexico City Opens Many New Vistas,' *New York Times*, 4 December 1949, 24.

fleeing radicals.¹⁰⁷ As Rebecca Schreiber reports, early exiles included many African American artists who sought freedom from ‘racial discrimination and political persecution’ in the United States.¹⁰⁸ They were followed by a large number of Hollywood workers who were blacklisted by the film industry, including screenwriters Hugo Butler, Dalton Trumbo, Gordon Kahn, Albert Maltz, and John Bright.¹⁰⁹ These cultural producers chose to leave the United States in light of ‘government harassment’ under Senator McCarthy’s communist hunt, and fled the policies that could see them subpoenaed by committees or detained under the Internal Security Act.¹¹⁰ Mexico was the country of choice because of its proximity, the lack of an extradition treaty, the fact that American citizens did not need a passport to cross the border (and anyone suspected of connections to the communist party would not have been issued a passport) and the cheaper cost of living.¹¹¹

Through the experiences and writings of these left-wing exiles in Mexico, American tourism south of the border appears explicitly as a symbol and symptom of the kind of ‘informal imperialism’ that John Britton argues characterised the relationship between the two countries during this period.¹¹² American tourism to Mexico in particular provided a way for these exiles to articulate concerns about the US’s connections with Mexico. Writing of Willard Motley’s work, Schreiber argues that ‘[t]ourism...functioned as a literary trope for discussing US racism and imperialism.’¹¹³ In his writing, ‘Motley’s experimentations in point of view, specifically refracted across lines of race, class, and nation, contributed to ... an expressly anti-imperialist mode of representation that, by staging indigenous perspectives that frame and challenge tourism, undermines the unilateral point of view that shapes traditional travel narratives’.¹¹⁴ For Schreiber, American imperialism is thrown into focus through the questioning and breaking down of traditional tourist perspectives. In the texts she analyses, the use of US tourism as a means of questioning the country’s position in the world begins to destabilise the position of the United States as protector of the American continent and opponent of old world colonialism.

¹⁰⁷ See for example, ‘Hall, Fugitive Red, Seized in Mexico, Deported to U.S.,’ *New York Times*, 10 October 1951, 1. On the self-imposed exile of communists, socialists and fellow travellers, see Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles*.

¹⁰⁸ Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles*, 166.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, x.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹¹² Britton, *Revolution*, 8.

¹¹³ Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles*, 137.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

Similarly, in the films which this thesis examines, the depiction of the United States' influence and intervention internationally is unstable. There is no unified political position among these movies, but it is through the complex and debated status of colonialism that they interact with and sometimes interrogate tourism and traditional travel narratives.

In his study of border crossers, Bender draws a comparison between fugitives and a very specific category of tourists, claiming that 'border fugitives share the ideal with the vice tourist of enjoying some pursuit – here freedom – that is less available within the United States.'¹¹⁵ But the parallel search for greater freedom than was granted in the US can be drawn between fugitives and tourists of all kinds. In *Where Danger Lives*, alongside several other films in the thesis, Mexico is represented as backwards and primitive, and it is through this primitivism that tourists, fugitives and political refugees are adjoined as the country promises both exoticism and freedom from the kinds of law, order and politics exercised in the United States. As outlined in the introduction, the search for a contrast from everyday sights and sites is a crucial element of what John Urry has called the 'tourist gaze.' In an earlier study, Dean MacCannell found that his data consistently pointed to the idea that 'tourist attractions are precisely analogous to the religious symbolism of primitive peoples.'¹¹⁶ Implicit in Urry's search for contrast and breaks from the mundane is the need for an other to be maintained, kept fixed in place; an other which is, in this case, more traditional than modern US society, and which functions akin to MacCannell's primitive symbolism. This conception of tourism positions modern spectators in opposition to primitive sights. By way of response and as indicated in the introduction, this chapter instead develops a conception of the touristic encounter through space and movement, and sites rather than sights.

The romance of the road

Thomas Torrans has theorised the role of the US-Mexico border as a place of escape through his concept of the 'magic curtain.' Torrans argues that as a magic curtain, the border 'is transformation itself, the embodiment of change. It is a storied place that alters all who pass through it in one form or another. And it remains the visionary's kingdom of the eternal quest for whatever goal the would-be-seeker

¹¹⁵ Bender, *Run for the Border*, 10.

¹¹⁶ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976; repr., Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1999), 2.

searches'.¹¹⁷ Although the notion of a 'magic curtain' is somewhat vague, Torrans' focus on the 'storied' and transformational nature of the boundary is useful as it suggests a heavily narrativised space that offers transformation. For the protagonists in *Where Danger Lives*, crossing the border offers the opportunity for change and transformation, and they duly plan to start a new life together as husband and wife beyond the boundary. The romantic draw of Mexico for Lannington and Cameron is so strong that it structures the entire narrative of the film, and the border becomes exactly the kind of narrativised space that Torrans describes.

Following the movie's exposition section set in San Francisco, the narrative is driven solely by the desire of the two protagonists to reach the Mexico border. The film travels steadily south from San Francisco through the changing US landscape until it arrives in the border town of Nogales. Once the characters are on the move, the film's locations are constantly changing and the narrative pace is fast. The story features various incidents which impede their journey, building tension as they get closer to reaching the borderline. A car crash in a small town almost brings involvement with the police, and a strange encounter with a local 'Wild West Whiskers Week' festival in another frontier town detains them overnight. Police roadblocks and patrols force the couple to change their route, which eventually takes them into the dark backstreets and cabaret theatres of Nogales. These delays and hold-ups disrupt the journey to the border, and serve to highlight the importance of the boundary in demarcating the limits of the narrative.¹¹⁸ The film's early dialogue prefigures the explicitly spatial narrative that will follow. Before they leave, Lannington's husband (Claude Rains) warns Cameron, 'If you take her, it's a long road and there's no turning back... time passes and then there's the end of the road.' Cameron and Lannington's romance plays out spatially through their journey, and the border functions as the 'end of the road' for the narrative which finally sees Lannington shot by American border police as she clings to the boundary fence.

Automobile travel plays an important role in films featuring escapes to the border from this period, and particularly so in *Where Danger Lives*. The entire journey to Mexico takes place in vehicles and occupies a large proportion of screen time. The

¹¹⁷ Torrans, *Magic Curtain*, 24.

¹¹⁸ This can also be understood in terms of narrative flow and blockage as described in cognitive approaches to film theory. See for example, Torben Grodal, 'Emotions, Cognitions, and Narrative Patterns in Film,' in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, ed. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 127-145.

sale of automobiles rose sharply in the post-Second World War period in the US, and at this time, travelling and exploring the country by car became an important part of what it meant to be American. Mark Osteen has argued that in the late 1940s and 1950s, ‘Americans internalized their identification with cars, commodifying themselves via automotive self-extension. The selling of autos in the aftermath of World War II, when automobility was promoted as a solution to economic and social malaise, encouraged this process.’¹¹⁹ Osteen describes how this form of automobility was constructed as an antidote to personal problems, which enabled ordinary families to travel and brought a new degree of freedom to American life. Further, in his study of the production of free roadmaps by oil companies in this period, James Akerman has claimed that automobile travel and exploration of the US became ‘the quintessential expression of American identity.’¹²⁰ Linking back to frontier mythology, Akerman argues that this new mobile construction of American identity placed emphasis on moving, exploring and mapping territory.¹²¹ Travelling by car became an intrinsic part of what it meant to be an American at this time, and the free maps were significant in that they often promoted specific routes away from major highways, and pointed out sites of national interest, for example national parks. For Akerman, this large body of free maps demonstrates the ‘industry-wide promotional argument that discretionary automobile travel was not merely a pleasant diversion, but was in fact an essential act of American citizenship in the twentieth century.’¹²²

Drawing on the analyses of Osteen and Akerman, in *Where Danger Lives*, the protagonists’ automobile journey can also be understood as constitutive of national identity and American citizenship. Emphasis is placed on the planning and mapping of their journey, as the characters are regularly shown using maps in the car. Whilst Lannington is at the wheel, Cameron traces their route with his finger along a folded road map, which appears to be an example of the free gas station maps that Akerman describes. Cinematic audiences are very much implicated in these mapping moments; echoing the process through which film locates viewers, the mapping moments in the movie construct a viewer spatially as they locate themselves and the characters within the filmic space and on the route to the border. As the characters drive further south,

¹¹⁹ Mark Osteen, ‘Noir’s Cars: Automobility and Amoral Space in American Film Noir,’ *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 35:4 (2008): 184.

¹²⁰ James R. Akerman, ‘Twentieth-Century American Road Maps and the Making of a National Motorized Space,’ in *Cartographies of Travel and Navigation*, ed. James R. Akerman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 152.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 154.

shots of the vehicle amidst the landscape are shown, tracing its progress through the changing terrain. At points the camera hovers just in front of the vehicle looking through the windscreen at the protagonists as both camera and motor move through the countryside, shaking slightly with every bump and shudder of the road. This shot literally transports its viewers along with the van, creating haptic sensations of motion and automobile travel, enacting the kind of mobile American identity Akerman describes.

Going further than Akerman's conclusions, the emphasis on tourism and touring in *Where Danger Lives* also implicates cinema in the production of a mobile, travelling American identity. Examining the connections between cinema and earlier practices of spectatorship, Giuliana Bruno has argued that '[t]he art of viewing followed the older touristic drive to survey and embrace a particular terrain: the compulsion to map a territory and position oneself within it.'¹²³ Thus for Bruno, cinema derives from the very same genealogy as travelling and mapping and shares with them an important spatial and geographic lineage. In *Where Danger Lives*, the explicit emphasis on cartography and landscape brings this connection to the fore, and the film itself is positioned as a touristic act, one that is constitutive of American identity.

Touristic and romantic encounters

The acts of mapping in *Where Danger Lives* are closely linked to the positioning of the protagonists, and film viewers, as tourists. Through their journey to the border, Cameron and Lannington are constructed as travelling subjects, and their identities become entwined with the journey itself. As the police follow their trail, Cameron and Lannington are constantly identified and defined by their vehicle. The convertible they set off in is swapped for a rusty van in order to throw their pursuers off the scent. As they traverse the empty, parched desert, the action cuts between the incessant spinning of the vehicle's wheels and close-ups of the faces of the characters. A tracking shot moves alongside the bottom of the van from the front wheel to the back, with the road blurring the rest of the screen. A close-up of a spinning tyre fades into Lannington's

¹²³ Bruno, *Atlas*, 176. Much work has been undertaken on the connections between movies, motorcars and modernity more broadly. See for example Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004) and Tom Gunning, 'Modernity and Cinema: A Culture of Shocks and Flows,' in *Cinema and Modernity*, ed. Murray Pomerance (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 297-315. Akerman also discusses the influence of both railways and automobiles on American culture in 'Road Maps'.

face, and later another shot of a wheel turning relentlessly on the hot tarmac is faded across an extreme close-up of Cameron's eyes and forehead. The linking of the wheels and the characters evokes not only their tense and whirling state of mind at this point in their journey, but also constructs them as travelling subjects whose identities are inextricably bound with movement, touring and travel.

These travelling protagonists participate in touristic encounters on their journey as they pass through two towns, pretending to be a couple on their way to wed in Mexico. In both places they are addressed as tourists, and the differences between the modern, vibrant city of San Francisco where the movie began, and these old-fashioned, backwater towns become extant. As the film's theatrical trailer's titles make clear, the movie transports filmgoers 'from penthouse... to bordertown dives!' The film's opening in San Francisco highlights American modernity, as skyscrapers glimmer and traffic moves swiftly over a bridge outlined with lights sparkling against the night sky. Scenes of the city buildings at night fade into one another, shimmering with the glamour and modernity of the metropolitan space. In sharp contrast, as the film approaches the border, the landscape becomes increasingly empty, dull and deserted. These small towns, one called Postville, and the other unnamed, are home to bilingual populations and both Americans and Mexicans. The one Mexican speaking role in the movie is that of Pablo (Julian Rivero), an aging drunk driver who is helped out of trouble with the US sheriff by his Spanish-speaking friend Dr Maynard (Harry Shannon). Pablo is unable to operate his decrepit car correctly, and is dressed in dirty, shabby clothing. Lannington and Cameron crash their vehicle into his, and this encounter cannot help but create oppositions between the modern Americans with their technology, smart clothes and mobility, and the borderlands filled with broken vehicles that cannot travel and backwards inhabitants who are stuck in the past.¹²⁴

Touristic encounters also take place in a bar in San Francisco early on in the movie. The set features an explicitly tropical decor, with lush vegetation and palm trees filling the screen, creating the effect of an exotic untouched landscape. Cocktails are served in coconut shells, and seating is constructed of bamboo and foliage. As Cameron enters the bar, a long tracking shot follows him through the smoky atmosphere as he searches for Lannington, the physical movement of the camera recalling the exploring,

¹²⁴ Pablo is devoid of a surname, and his overtly typically Mexican forename further emphasises the reductive and tokenistic role the character serves.

tracking and mapping qualities of American identity proposed by Akerman.¹²⁵ The tropical bar constructs the two lovers as tourists as they sample exotic drinks and food, and dance the night away in a place outside of the space and time of their ordinary everyday lives. The bar prefigures their escape to Mexico as their romance is tied to the tropical space; this is the only place where they meet, and the lovers' language emphasises this sense of spatial specificity as Cameron declares he wants Lannington 'here, like this.' The fact that they go on to encounter only barren dusty landscapes and dark and dangerous towns on their journey highlights the romanticism at work in the characters' expectations of Mexico. Their dream of romantic Mexico is attainable only in the simulated space of the tropical bar, and likewise their relationship cannot survive the realities of their decidedly unexotic journey to Mexico. Through the difference between the reality of the characters' borderlands encounters and the romanticised vision of Mexico evoked in the bar, the film knowingly calls attention to its own exoticising of the country.

Throughout the film, the modern travelling Americans are clearly contrasted with the backwards borderlands dwellings and inhabitants that they encounter. Cameron and Lannington enact mobile, modern identities which fix into place the undeveloped locations around them. Produced as the US tourists' others, these primitive towns are presented as artefacts and are fixed in time and place. Thus the film adds an extra dimension to Akerman's understanding of the connections between travelling and American national identity. While the depiction of tourism, and auto-tourism in particular, as an essentially American pastime produces an idea of the nation as mobile and explorational, it also constructs Mexico for the United States as a fixed, static space. In mapping out the mobility of travelling Americans, *Where Danger Lives* also demarcates and fixes Mexico into place. The romance of Mexico produces mobile, travelling American subjects, but simultaneously takes away possibilities of movement for Mexico and Mexicans.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that one of the key ways in which Mexico was represented in American cold war cinema is as a romanticised, romantic place. In *Where Danger Lives*, the romance of Mexico pervades the entire narrative of the film,

¹²⁵ Akerman, 'Road Maps,' 152.

drawing the characters towards the border to pursue a new life together below the boundary. The Mexico border has served as an escape route from the United States ever since its establishment, and has been depicted as such in cinema since the beginning of the twentieth century. In *Where Danger Lives*, the protagonists plan to head south of the border to escape US jurisdiction but also to enjoy the romantic, tropical sites on offer. It is through the representation of Mexico as primitive that its romance takes on both touristic and fugitive imperatives, offering both an exotic escape from everyday life, as well as refuge from the modern law and order of the United States. Mexico's role as sanctuary in the film also recalls the left-wing political refugees who travelled to Mexico to escape persecution and prosecution under American cold war policies.

The chapter has conceptualised tourism as a practice which requires a backwards or primitive other in order to function, but moving away from Urry's idea of a tourist 'gaze,' it proposes an understanding of tourist mobility which envisages tourist encounters through space and movement. For *Where Danger Lives*, the travelling Americans are mobile, and they explore, track and map the terrain they visit. Meanwhile, the sites they encounter remain fixed and static in place and time. American tourism to Mexico was transformed by the explosion of automobile ownership in the 1950s, and this, coupled with the opening of new pan-American highways, led to a huge boom in American travel south of the border. Newly affordable family cars only heightened the level of movement and exploration enjoyed by large numbers of Americans; activities which Akerman argues become the quintessential components of United States national identity. In *Where Danger Lives*, the travelling protagonists are defined through their automobile journey, and identified explicitly with their vehicles. However, through their tourism, it is not just mobile American identities which are produced, but Mexico is also constructed as a static, fixed location for travelling Americans to explore.

Through the romance of Mexico, *Where Danger Lives* thus interrogates the relationship between the US and its southern neighbour. The fact that Farrow repeatedly turned to Mexico as a location for his movies is also significant. Following *Where Danger Lives* and *His Kind of Woman*, he directed such pictures as *Ride, Vaquero!* and *Plunder of the Sun* in 1953, which are also concerned with the relationship between the US and Mexico. As later chapters will investigate in more detail, the connections between filmmakers and the politics of border films are complex. But the undecidability of the depiction of the United States' imperial relationship with Mexico

displayed in films such as *Where Danger Lives* echoes the real complexity with which discourses of colonialism functioned in the Cold War. A tension lies at the heart of *Where Danger Lives* between its celebration of travelling American identities and its acknowledgement that this mobility constructs a romanticised representation of Mexico as static and fixed. This conflict corresponds with the US's own contemporary position as both loud defender against colonialism and instigator of imperial interventions.

Although the characters only reach the border in the final scenes of *Where Danger Lives*, the international boundary is present throughout the film as a romantic ideal. Not concerned with the realities of the US-Mexico border in the 1950s, it is the dream of reaching Mexico that drives the film's narrative, and it is through the process of travelling that the American characters' identities are constituted. At the very end of the film, as Lannington dies, the sign 'dreamland' flashes unreachable through the border fence. Her romantic Mexican dream is literally shot down by the American border police, and the film knowingly suggests it has been unattainable all along. The next chapter investigates the romantic representation of Mexico in *Borderline*, a film also released in 1950. Like *Where Danger Lives*, *Borderline* links Mexico to romance through relationships and the representation of the country as primitive and exotic. However, for *Borderline*, the romance of its protagonists is not doomed and instead flourishes as they tour the Mexican landscape.

Chapter Two

Masquerades, Mapping and Transformation: Identity and Ethnicity in *Borderline* (1950)

As a car approaches a checkpoint along the US-Mexico border in the film *Borderline*, its American passengers prepare to have their identity checked. The two protagonists of the film have been sent undercover into Mexico to bust a cross-border smuggling ring, and in the course of their investigations they assume different layers of disguise. As they complete their investigations and head to the American border, both characters are performing three separate identities concurrently; US police officers, criminals and honeymooners. The audience is aware of these shifting personas, but neither character knows the real identity of the other. They cross back into the United States with their various layers of disguise intact, despite undergoing interrogation by an immigration official. This emphasis on disguise and identity is typical of several of the border crossing films from this period. Alongside *Borderline*, for *Border Incident*, *His Kind of Woman* and *Wetbacks* too, crossing the border initiates a process of identity transformation, and all of these movies display a particular preoccupation with undercover agents, disguise and identity.

Following chapter one, this chapter continues to investigate the ways in which Mexico is represented as a romanticised site in American cinema. The notion that tourism provided an opportunity for personal imaginary exploration and transformational experiences was central to romantic travel writing. Amanda Gilroy argues that tourism was conceptualised through the construction of ‘imaginary spaces of personal liberation’, and that imaginative personal discovery was as equally important as the physical journeys undertaken.¹²⁶ For the lead characters in *Borderline*, travelling to Mexico involves precisely this form of physical and imaginative journey, as its protagonists explore different disguises and identities while they travel and ultimately discover that they have fallen in love. The romance of Mexico precipitates the characters’ own romance, and crossing the border begins a process in which identities undergo change and transformation. The relationship between the travelling American

¹²⁶ Gilroy, ‘Introduction,’ 2.

protagonists and the Mexican characters they meet also bring important questions of ethnic identity to the fore.

In *Borderline* the cinematic border becomes a site of escape for the movie's American protagonists. The film is not concerned with representing events which were taking place at the border during this period and it makes no reference to Mexican border crossers. The boundary serves instead as a mythologised and romanticised site. The first section of the chapter begins with an investigation into historic representations of the US-Mexico border. Undertaking a close textual analysis of the cinematic space and landscape of *Borderline*'s border crossings, I contend that the film's inability to represent the border on-screen is connected to its history as an indefinable construct without real world referent. The instability of this divide between the two countries highlights contemporary debates about the US-Mexico relationship. The border also plays an important role in the film's narrative, and the second part of the chapter examines the way in which border crossings direct the narrative structure. Travelling to Mexico precipitates the performing of multiple identities for the American characters as they take on many layers of disguise. In this way, Mexico becomes a romanticised site of transformation, and identity is specifically marked as playful and performative for the American travellers. The final section of the chapter moves on to consider the representation of Mexico in the film, analysing the depiction of Mexican characters and cinematic space. I argue that the Americans' playful layers of disguise and the film's representations of ethnicity both relate to the way in which identity was handled in Hollywood at the time. Although ethnicity was understood as something flexible and performable, not all parts were open to all actors and the notion of interchangeable 'ethnic' roles served to widen divisions.

Borderline has not received much critical attention to date, although it has been analysed by Ellena Dell'Agnese as part of a geopolitical study of border films. This chapter focuses on *Borderline* precisely because it has not been studied in detail before, but also to address Dell'Agnese's reductive claims that it is simply a 'racist' film.¹²⁷ Of course each viewer will judge the film's representation of Mexico and Mexicans for themselves and on their own terms, but for this thesis the more interesting and important questions to ask are concerned with how and why the film's depictions operate and what

¹²⁷ Ellena Dell'Agnese, 'The US-Mexico Border in American Movies: A Political Geography Perspective,' in *Cinema and Popular Geo-Politics*, ed. Marcus Power and Andrew Crampton (London: Routledge, 2007), 20.

their relationships to their cultural contexts are. I therefore argue that developing a more nuanced understanding of the way in which representations of other cultures function is more useful than simply condemning texts and closing them down.

Mapping a symbolic boundary

In *Borderline*, the US-Mexico border becomes a place of transformation and escape from everyday life for its American characters. Before closely examining how border crossings are visually and spatially depicted in the film, it is useful to consider the representational problems faced by historical attempts to define and pin down the border. The following excerpt from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which was written to map out the line of the US-Mexico border in 1848 demonstrates just how problematic the task of defining this international boundary is:

The Boundary line between the two Republics shall commence in the Gulf of Mexico, three leagues from land, opposite the mouth of the Rio Grande, otherwise called Rio Bravo del Norte, opposite the mouth of it's [sic] deepest branch, if it should have more than one branch emptying directly into the sea; from thence, up the middle of that river, following the deepest channel, where it has more than one to the point where it strikes the Southern boundary of New Mexico; thence, westwardly along the whole Southern Boundary of New Mexico (which runs north of the town called *Paso*) to it's [sic] western termination; thence, northward, along the western line of New Mexico, until it intersects the first branch of the river Gila; (or if it should not intersect any branch of that river, then, to the point on the said line nearest to such branch, and thence in a direct line to the same;) thence down the middle of the said branch and of the said river, until it empties into the Rio Colorado; thence, across the Rio Colorado, following the division line between Upper and Lower California, to the Pacific Ocean.¹²⁸

Through this treaty, which was drawn up following the US-Mexican war, Mexico was forced to sell around a third of its territory to the United States, and the lengthy sentence above is just one part of a larger text with accompanying map which seeks to pin down the borderline. The text is filled with clarifying statements and sub-clauses which attempt to fix meaning and remove any ambiguity around the border's route.¹²⁹ But

¹²⁸ 'Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,' in *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America, 1776-1949*, vol. 9, ed. Charles Bevans (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 1972), 794.

¹²⁹ For an account of the writing and implementation of the treaty see Richard Griswold Del Castillo, 'The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,' in *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Oscar J. Martínez (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1996), 2-9.

rather than establishing a clear borderline, the superfluous language seems to over-write the border. Through its attempts to provide a clear delineation of the boundary, the treaty text demonstrates the very impossibility of representing it.

The representation of the border is so difficult in the treaty because the text must compensate for the possibility of physical movements and changes in the boundary line. Although it defines the border through physical referents, these are subject to change and movement. The borderline cannot ultimately be fixed because it has undergone, and continues to undergo, almost constant physical change. Alongside large-scale changes in the boundary that preceded and followed this treaty through international negotiations, the fact that rivers determine parts of its course reveals a boundary in constant flux. David Lorey reports that in the 1860s, a 600 acre strip of land which was originally part of Mexico suddenly found itself north of the river and part of US territory after flooding had changed the river's course, resulting in a dispute over the land which was not resolved until 1963.¹³⁰

Maps play an important role within *Borderline* and the presence of maps of the border region in the background of certain scenes forms another key way in which the representation of the boundary is negotiated in the film. The relationship between mapping and space is a complex one. Jean Baudrillard has posited that it is 'the map that precedes the territory,' positioning cartographic representation as the forerunner to the landscape itself.¹³¹ Similarly, John Pickles argues that 'mapping, even as it claimed to represent the world, produced it.'¹³² For Pickles, the difference between the map and the world disappears as the mapped representations become the borders and boundaries themselves. From the example of the textual mapping of the US-Mexico border in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, it is clear that the map does in many ways precede the territory. The text of the treaty literally maps out a border that did not previously exist. However, the process of mapping does not always recognise itself as 'representing the real' as Pickles asserts. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo's representation of the border over-writes and overloads its own definition, calling attention to itself and the fact that there is no real line on the ground which it depicts. Even the title of the map accompanying the text reveals the textuality of its cartography. Called 'Map of the

¹³⁰ Lorey, *U.S.-Mexican Border*, 154.

¹³¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (1981; repr., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

¹³² John Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping and the Geo-Coded World* (London: Routledge, 2004), 93.

United Mexican States, as Organized and Defined by Various Acts of the Congress of Said Republic, and Constructed According to the Best Authorities,' the map is positioned as a representation that is contingent on other representations (the various acts of Congress) rather than any physical terrain.¹³³ Jeffrey Peters is more accurate when he asserts that a map 'denotes place while simultaneously connoting its own discursive authority.'¹³⁴ Peters argues that maps foreground their own constructedness in the very process of depiction, recognising that, in opposition to Pickles' claims, cartography acknowledges its own status as a representation. In this process, the 'authority' of maps is also highlighted, recalling that these self-consciously constructed borderlines and other mapped features exert significant power and effects on the world.

This understanding of maps and the self-conscious construction of boundaries is useful for examining the way border crossings operate in *Borderline*. In the film, the initial border crossing from the US into Mexico takes place off-camera as an invisible locational shift. The film cuts from opening scenes set in the US customs offices and lands viewers straight into Mexico with no use of signs, fences or maps to indicate the change in national terrain. Unlike many other critics writing about the US-Mexico border in cultural texts, Claire Fox has productively focused on the physical, visible and spatial aspects of mediations of the border. She argues that 'the fence and the river' are the key visual modes in which the border is signified.¹³⁵ But in *Borderline* the border crossing is unrepresentable and appears only as a cut – a break and gap in the filmic space – and a representative strategy which falls outside of Fox's analysis. In contrast to the physicality of the border fence in *Where Danger Lives* which is emphasised as Lannington clings to its wires, *Borderline*'s border is present only through its absence, and as I will argue, seems to undermine attempts to visually represent the border directly.

In order to signify that a locational change has taken place, the film instead deploys signs and symbols of Mexico. Following the cut, the new scene opens with the camera situated underneath an archway in the shade, peering out onto a bright, dusty road. In the foreground of the image a woman prepares tacos on a hot plate, and a man in a sombrero rests on a stool. The scene is bustling with street vendors selling food, people having their shoes shined, and donkeys loaded with goods. Buildings are run

¹³³ 'Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,' 794.

¹³⁴ Jeffrey Peters, *Mapping Discord: Allegorical Cartography in Early Modern French Writing* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 41.

¹³⁵ Fox, *Fence and River*, 50.

down and mismatched, their adobe fronts scattered with signs in both English and Spanish which crowd the screen. The music here is also instantly recognisable as Mexican in style with trumpets, guitar and Latin rhythms. This locational shift moves the film's action straight from the American customs office to the archway, and the lack of a border or a physical divide within the cinematic landscape seems to provoke the need for the over-use of signs and symbols which situate the action in Mexico. As Fox has argued with reference to postcards of the border produced during the early twentieth century, 'national differentiation was a process of training spectators by means of symbolic codes.'¹³⁶ As was the case with these metaphoric postcards, *Borderline*'s border crossing is purely symbolic; it does not take place on-screen, and is depicted only through its absence, followed by the signs and symbols indicating that the national terrain of the film has shifted.

The second and final border-crossing scene in *Borderline* negotiates the representation of the boundary in a different way to the first. Here, the divide between the two countries is depicted as an administrative one and an immigration checkpoint becomes the crossing signifier. This border-crossing scene is set up with a series of two establishing shots showing checkpoints laid out across a wide road, while the borderline itself remains unmarked. US flags are situated on the nearside of the checkpoint, indicating that viewers are watching from the American side. Giuliana Bruno has argued that an establishing shot like this

makes manifest a particular form of mapping: it exerts the pressure of a regulatory measure against the practice of border crossing. The drawing of place established by the establishing shot reveals a geographic phenomenon at work in film that we can recognize as cartographic anxiety and its release.¹³⁷

For Bruno, the establishing shot literally maps film viewers into place, clearly situating them in space before cutting to the next piece of action. 'Cartographic anxiety' is caused by the dislocating effects of film, which, without the establishing shots, would leave viewers ungrounded and destabilised.

The cartographic anxiety induced by *Borderline*'s border crossing reveals a flux and flow between the territories of the two countries in the film. Unable to draw a firm line between them, the filmic space overcompensates through embedding overt signs of

¹³⁶ Ibid., 78.

¹³⁷ Bruno, *Atlas*, 271.

nationality, such as the flag, within the landscape which highlights the unstable nature of national terrain and identity. Again, this manifestation of the border as an administrative checkpoint is not addressed by Fox in her work. Camilla Fojas argues that many westerns from this period set on and around the border ‘show the difference between nations in makeshift signs indicating the limits of the United States.’¹³⁸ For Fojas, these signs demonstrate ‘how effectively the United States has institutionalized control of the border’.¹³⁹ Although *Borderline* has not been categorised as a western, contrary to Fojas’ claims, the absent, undetermined and symbolic boundaries of the film are the same as those found in many westerns from this period, two of which will be examined in detail in chapters four and five. The absent or indeterminate cinematic border is just as important as the fences, rivers and signs that serve to symbolise its presence in other texts. These shifting cinematic landscapes bring important geographic and political concerns to the fore, whatever the particular form that the symbolic border takes. Through its absence and over-determination in cinematic signs and symbols, *Borderline*’s border recalls the problems of representation encountered in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo’s attempts to define the international boundary.

Maps feature in *Borderline* as attempts to fix and control the unruly borderlands space. They appear on the wall behind the desks of two key authority figures in the film, Mr Peterson (Charles Lane) at the US customs office, and Harvey Gumbin (Roy Roberts), head of a cross-border drug ring. The maps signify their competing wishes to control the border and to hold absolute knowledge of the area. Peterson’s map shows Mexico and the southern United States and the border between them. He is presented as master of this map of the borderlands as he issues instructions in front of and over it; the map and the authority it represents speaks of control of the area and emphasises the power of the US authorities. Similarly, in Gumbin’s office, the map is situated behind his desk. He is shown standing next to the map, illustrating his attempts to master the territory through his smuggling racket. Because maps do not simply denote place, but are also conscious of their own status as representation, they function as *mise-en-abymes* within the movie. Their impossible terrains play out the desire to control and map out the border both by police and criminals alike. They enable the drug ring to run its trade through the region, and subsequently, to help the police map out their movements and pin them down. As representations of the borderline, these cinematic

¹³⁸ Fojas, *Border Bandits*, 184.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

maps create a boundary that is unfixable and symbolic, produced and determined only through documentation and signs.

Identity transformations

In a similar way to *Where Danger Lives*, border crossings direct and frame *Borderline*'s narrative, which begins and ends at the border. The film's plot sees a female US police officer, Madeleine Haley (Claire Trevor) sent undercover into Mexico to bust a cross-border drug-smuggling gang. In the course of her investigations she meets a US gangster, Jonny McEvoy (Fred MacMurray) who is later revealed to be another undercover police officer. The two fall in love, travel back across the border together and proceed to catch the criminals. Opening in a US customs office, the film's action begins as Haley is quickly appointed to the job south of the border. From her arrival in Mexico, the locations are constantly shifting as the movie travels around the country and this travelling drives the narrative forward. After meeting McEvoy and being coerced (while undercover) to transport drugs into the United States for a narcotics boss, a deadline north of the border steers the narrative direction back towards the US. The countdown until the border is reached builds tension, because crossing back over will mean that Haley and McEvoy's layers of disguises will be exposed. As in *Where Danger Lives*, it is the presence of the border that controls the space and time of the narrative, and which directs the levels of tension and suspense throughout the film.

In addition to serving this explicit narrative function in the film, the border becomes a romantic space of escape. In order to cross over, the characters must take on new personas, and they revel in this break from their everyday lives and normal identities. Indeed, both Haley and McEvoy playfully inhabit a whole series of different disguises as they travel throughout Mexico. In their initial undercover roles, officer Haley becomes Gladys Laroue, floozy showgirl, and McEvoy becomes Johnny Macklin, a tough talking mobster. When they are ordered to smuggle drugs across the border, they subsequently assume another layer of masquerade as a couple, Mr and Mrs Macklin, on their honeymoon. Further layers of disguise are added near the end of the journey as the pair try to forget the impending end of their romantic encounter and become Señor and Señora Jackson. After they have arrived back in the United States,

these different personas fall away as the characters are revealed to be undercover police officers. The film's press kit highlights the characters' performative layers of identities, stating that 'at the border [...] they are unmasked to each other.'¹⁴⁰

The continued playful performance of different personas in the film recalls the ways in which travel in the romantic period was figured as an imaginary, self-constitutive process as well as a geographic journey. As Paul Smethurst argues of romantic travel writing, 'the motifs of empirical exploration and discovery are transformed and internalised such that the sensation of new horizons (*horizontality*) becomes the impetus for inner journeys.'¹⁴¹ In *Borderline*'s romanticised encounters with Mexico, too, the purpose of the physical journey becomes one of 'self-discovery,' in which the characters explicitly engage in the invention of other selves.¹⁴² The different selves and personas they inhabit through their travels in Mexico show their identities to be unstable and performative, guaranteed only through external signs.¹⁴³

At the end of the film as the characters return to the United States, the border between the two countries is represented as an administrative one, and is depicted through the characters' interactions with immigration and customs officers. Admission into the US is contingent on the extremely brief exchange between the immigration officer and the characters. The check point officer observes them, looking for signs of nationality, and ostensibly because he considers the couple sufficiently American, they are let through without having to produce any identity papers. The officer also inquires about their places of birth, and clearly listens with interest to their accents, but the audience is given no indication that these are truthful answers. The protagonists pass through the immigration check point with their double-disguises intact, raising questions around the issue of proof of identity, but also highlighting the potential for discrimination when interrogations of identity are based on appearance.

Historian John Torpey has argued that '[b]oundaries between persons that are rooted in the legal category of nationality can only be maintained, it turns out, by documents indicating a person's nationality, for there simply is no other way to know

¹⁴⁰ *Borderline* press pack, British Film Institute National Archive, 1950, n.pag.

¹⁴¹ Paul Smethurst, *Travel Writing and the Natural World: 1768-1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 184.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁴³ In this way, this formulation of identity is distinct from Judith Butler's later understanding of gender identity as a constitutive, performative process. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

this fact about someone.’¹⁴⁴ For Torpey, legal nationality cannot be fully determined by anything other than possession of the correct documents, in other words, through signs external to the person. At *Borderline*’s border, identity is similarly contingent on external signs. Once back in the US, the protagonists protest their true identities as US citizens and police officers, yet neither character will believe the other until another officer backs them up. Here at the border check point, the supreme site of identity-checking and confirmation, identities are revealed to be unstable constructions, something only determined externally.

During the film Trevor’s character undergoes the most identity transformations on-screen, and the play between her different layers of disguise is constantly foregrounded. In a scene where Haley (as Laroue) is searching for information about the narcotics boss in his empty room, he suddenly returns. She is able to escape discovery as an undercover cop by applying a different identity in the mirror; putting on make-up and appropriating a drunken act enable her to avoid arousing suspicion. A further transformative moment occurs when the couple spend the night at a hotel. This time, we see Haley (as Laroue disguised as Mrs Macklin) apply a face masque in the bathroom mirror, before returning to the bedroom and resisting McEvoy’s attempts at uncovering her identity. He asks her ‘what’s your name, your real name?’ and ‘where are you from?’ Her mask remains intact as she retorts, ‘what on earth difference could that make’ and ‘here and there.’ This literal face masque adds another layer of disguise, highlighting the multiple identities that Haley embodies at this moment.

The layers of identities and masks inhabited by the characters in the film recalls Annette Kuhn’s conception of performance and identity. Kuhn argues:

An actor’s role is assumed like a mask, the mask concealing the performer’s ‘true self.’...In effecting a distance between assumed persona and real self, the practice of performance constructs a subject which is both fixed in the distinction between role and self and the same time, paradoxically, called into question in the very act of performance. For over against the ‘real self,’ a performance poses the possibility of a mutable self, of a fluidity of subjectivity.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

¹⁴⁵ Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1985), 52.

The fact that the characters take on further roles and performances in *Borderline* multiplies Kuhn's formulation, complicating the relationship between personas and self through the many different roles inhabited. As I will argue, the actors' star personas are also implicated in the film as further layers of meaning, which, as Kuhn contends, functions to call ideas of performance and identity into question. The multifarious identities of the film's characters work precisely to suggest 'the possibility of a mutable self, of a fluidity of subjectivity' which, for *Borderline*, is only open to the travelling Americans.

An early exchange in the movie also emphasises the extent of the transformations Haley undergoes. While she is briefed on the criminal gang ahead of her assignment in Mexico, the male officer heading the case is sceptical that she will be successful because of the drug boss's preference for 'tawdry, cheap-looking dames.' But other men in the room reassure him, 'she could pass.' As the chief is convinced Haley can become the kind of dame the criminal will go for, the movie also makes an extra-textual nod to Trevor's previous roles, as well as an explicit reference to the practice of ethnic passing which is discussed below. Ray Hagen argues that Trevor was best known at this time for playing 'the hard-boiled Western saloon keeper-madam with a feather boa and a heart of gold,' and most notably for her role as the prostitute Dallas in *Stagecoach*.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, *Borderline*'s contemporary audience would have been well aware that Trevor could 'pass' as the kind of woman required for the job. Haley's transformation into Gladys Laroue here is a clear reprise of the Dallas role, seeing her clad in similar attire as she dances and tries to lure the gangster with her performance. This slippage between Haley and Trevor adds yet another layer to the identities inscribed on the character.¹⁴⁷ Trevor gets equal billing with MacMurray in the film's publicity, but it is really her character that takes the lead and steals the show. Although it is of course significant that in order to do her job and undertake the investigation in Mexico, Trevor's character must play a whore. It is only through taking up this heavily gendered role, one which it seems the actor could not escape, that Trevor can become

¹⁴⁶ Ray Hagen, 'Claire Trevor: Brass with Class,' in Ray Hagen and Laura Wagner, *Killer Tomatoes: Fifteen Tough Film Dames* (Jefferson and London: McFarland and Company Inc., Publishers, 2004), 222.

¹⁴⁷ This understanding of the relationship between actors and characters is informed by Paul McDonald's analysis in *Hollywood Stardom* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2013) and his conflation of actor and character names as a way of demonstrating the important impact of star personas and brands on characters. See for example his analysis of Tom Hanks' star brand, 65-83.

the lead. Subverting the often limited role of the show girl, her character turns the part around, out-playing MacMurray and becoming the star of the movie.¹⁴⁸

Similarly, MacMurray's performance throughout the film is haunted by his dual star image. MacMurray was largely known for playing moral, upstanding characters in light-hearted romances and comedies including *No Time for Love* (Mitchell Leisen, 1943) and *The Egg and I* (Chester Erskine, 1947), but had also shown audiences his darker side in films such as Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944). This conflict between the light and heavy sides of MacMurray's cinematic career further draws out the tension in *Borderline*'s plot; until McEvoy is revealed to the audience as a police officer around halfway through the narrative, viewers are unsure whether he is truly a cruel gangster or not. As with Trevor, these additional layers of extra-textual expectations and echoes of previous roles further complicate the identities inscribed on MacMurray's performance. Explicitly drawing on the star personas and earlier films of its lead actors, *Borderline* self-consciously calls attention to the cinematic palimpsest of its characters' identities, building a conception of identity that is constituted of multiple, shifting layers. It is only the American characters which playfully inhabit multiple personas, and as the next section of the chapter will argue, this highlights the divisions and inequalities at work within Hollywood practices and cinematic representations of identity.

Hollywood ethnicities

Throughout the history of the mapping of the international divide, the border has resisted clear and simple definitions and these cartographic representations of the boundary cannot help but highlight their own constructedness. For *Borderline*, too, the border is a textual creation, shown through maps and signs in the filmic space. As a site which precipitates self-discovery and transformation for the American travellers, *Borderline*'s border highlights the fact that the different layers of identity adopted by the protagonists are also fluid, performative constructs which cannot be confirmed except through external signs. Because the performance of different personas and identities is open only to American characters in the film, this notion of identity as masquerade is significant in terms of the way in which identity, and specifically ethnicity, was

¹⁴⁸ The important issue of gender at the border will be focused on in more detail in chapter five.

understood in Hollywood at this time. The mobility and flexibility afforded to ethnically pure and white Americans as characters and as actors within the film industry serves to highlight the far more restricted and contingent way in which other ethnic identities were constructed in cinema at this time.

The explicit reference to ‘passing’ in the characters’ discussion of Haley’s undercover role described above is particularly relevant in terms of the regular practice of racial passing in the movie industry. During the 1950s, Mexican and Chicano actors regularly played a variety of nationalities on screen, a practice which was prevalent amongst actors of many different backgrounds.¹⁴⁹ For example, as Victoria Sturtevant has shown, in only her first few years in Hollywood, Mexican actor Lupe Vélez performed Native American, Cuban, Greek, Chinese, Indochinese, French Canadian, Russian, Portuguese and Mexican roles.¹⁵⁰ *Borderline* features Italian-American actor Grazia Narciso as Mrs Porfirio, wife of the local sheriff encountered by Madeleine and Johnny. Narciso regularly played Italians in Hollywood movies, but also played various other nationalities, including Mexican here.

Of course white actors also passed as ethnic and Mexican characters in Hollywood. Charlton Heston’s performance as Mexican narcotics officer Miguel/Mike Vargas in *Touch of Evil* will be explored in detail in the final chapter of the thesis. Other notable examples include Burt Lancaster’s performance as Native American Massai in *Apache* (Robert Aldrich, 1954), John Wayne as Genghis Khan in *The Conqueror* (Dick Powell, 1956), and Marlon Brando as Emiliano Zapata in *Viva Zapata!* (Elia Kazan, 1952). Almost the entire range of Hollywood nationalities was open to white actors, and this mobility of roles contrasts sharply with the fact that non-white or ethnic actors were seldom able to play white American characters. Despite the apparent fluidity within the ‘ethnic’ grouping, Hollywood’s practices kept these ethnic others fixed into place, without granting them individualised identities.

¹⁴⁹ I use the term Chicano to refer historically to Mexicans or people of Mexican or mixed Mexican origin living in the United States rather than today’s more commonly accepted term ‘Mexican-American’ because it was the language used during the 1950s, the period which also saw the emergence of the Chicano movement. In this way I seek also to begin to understand what this particular ethnic label meant at this point in time. I am not using Chicana/o here, because with its masculine (o) ending, Chicano deliberately retains the gender imbalance which female Mexicans and Mexican-Americans faced at this time. On the emergence and use of these different labels see, for example, Jacqueline M. Martinez, *Phenomenology of Chicana Experience and Identity: Communication and Transformation in Praxis* (Lanham and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 33-58.

¹⁵⁰ Victoria Sturtevant, ‘Spitfire: Lupe Vélez and the Ambivalent Pleasures of Ethnic Masquerade,’ *The Velvet Light Trap* 55 (2005): 23-24.

Scholarly debate around the construction of race and ethnicity in Hollywood and the US at large is broad and complex. Here I am referring only to ‘ethnicity’ as this is the term which appears in the media of this period and was also commonly used and differentiated from the more scientifically determinist concept of ‘race’ by scientists, sociologists and ethnographers.¹⁵¹ The interchangeability of ethnicity in Hollywood has been described by Lester Friedman as a ‘melting-pot mentality, one that ignores crucial differences in ethnic identities and blends cultural oppositions into a bland conception of Americanness.’¹⁵² Friedman claims that for Hollywood, ‘a Hispanic, a Jew, a black or an Asian,’ could be classified together in Hollywood’s ‘mix and match’ approach to ethnicity, but in a category that remained distinct from white Americans.¹⁵³ In contrast, Matthew Frye Jacobson contends that ethnicity was historically bound up with forms of ‘probationary whiteness’ through which ‘one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites.’¹⁵⁴ Diane Negra differentiates between ‘white ethnic’ and other ethnic identities, such as Mexican, arguing that many European immigrants chose to capitalise on this separation as they ‘retained, exaggerated or invented altogether a profitable ethnic persona.’¹⁵⁵ However, speaking specifically of Latin Americans in Hollywood, Clara Rodriguez argues that by the 1950s, actors had either to “‘Europeanize” their images’ and attempt to make their ethnic origins invisible, as in Rita Hayworth’s case, or alternatively ‘play up the stereotypes.’¹⁵⁶ For example, Dolores del Rio’s star persona emphasised her ethnicity and otherness, and she played a whole variety of ‘ethnic’ roles which were not specifically Mexican and were more defined through her association with upper class sophistication.¹⁵⁷

There is much critical debate on the historical position of Mexicans, Chicanas/os and Latin Americans in US society. For example, Mary Beltrán and Fojas argue that Latin Americans have historically held ‘shifting, uncertain positions’ along a ‘black-

¹⁵¹ See Richard Rees, *Shades of Difference: A History of Ethnicity in America* (Lanham and Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), chapter three in particular.

¹⁵² Lester D. Friedman, ‘Celluloid Palimpsests: An Overview of Ethnicity and the American Film,’ in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed. Lester D. Friedman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 24.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁵⁴ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Colour: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 176; 6.

¹⁵⁵ Diane Negra, *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 6.

¹⁵⁶ Clara E. Rodriguez, *Heroes, Lovers and Others: The Story of Latinos in Hollywood* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 110-111.

¹⁵⁷ Sturtevant, ‘Spitfire,’ 21.

white binary' in the United States, which positions them as 'nonwhite'.¹⁵⁸ However, it is clear that in the 1950s Hollywood's 'ethnic' category explicitly differentiated between black Americans and other ethnic groupings; although Latin Americans were certainly considered 'nonwhite,' they were also not black, and enjoyed far greater visibility on Hollywood screens than African Americans during this period. The apparent separation between white and other actors in Hollywood appears to be central to the film industry's construction of ethnicity. Yet the categories begin to collapse almost immediately upon closer inspection, as the supposedly all-American white Hollywood star could also be a recent European immigrant. Amidst these constantly fluctuating categories, the key issue seems to be one of assimilation. Members of those ethnic groups which were considered assimilated into the US nation were granted greater mobility in terms of roles available to them. These groups fit into what Gary Gerstle calls the country's tradition of 'civic nationalism.'¹⁵⁹ This ideology centred on beliefs in 'the fundamental equality of all human beings, in every individual's inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and in a democratic government'.¹⁶⁰ This civic nationalism, enshrined in the constitution, was accompanied and qualified by a 'racial nationalism' that understood America as 'a people held together by common blood and skin color', an ideology also endorsed in the constitution and which persisted in American law until 1952.¹⁶¹ Assimilated or invisible immigrants with the correct origins and skin colour thus had greater mobility in terms of roles available to them in the movies, including leading white American roles. There are examples of invisibly ethnic Mexican stars, such as Hayworth and Raquel Welch who actively performed idealised white American identities and were able to break out of the restricted range of roles on offer to them originally.¹⁶² Of course for Hayworth, (formerly Marguerita Cansino) this performance infamously involved months of painful electrolysis to shift her hairline to a position more appropriate for an 'American Hollywood star.'¹⁶³

However, assimilated groups did not include a significant proportion of Mexicans or Chicanos during the 1950s, with access to 'Mexican Americanism' and

¹⁵⁸ Mary Beltrán and Camilla Fojas, 'Mixed Race in Hollywood Film and Media Culture,' in *Mixed Race Hollywood*, ed. Mary Beltrán and Camilla Fojas (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008), 3.

¹⁵⁹ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶¹ As Gerstle points out, this 1790 law 'limit[ed] naturalization to "free white persons"' and although it was modified in 1870 it was not abolished until the 1950s. *Ibid.*, 8; 4.

¹⁶² Rodriguez, *Heroes*, 137-138.

¹⁶³ Neruccio, *Text]-Mex*, 93.

self-identification as ‘white Americans of Mexican ancestry’ determined by language, individual appearance and skin colour.¹⁶⁴ Although (unlike African Americans) Mexican or Chicano actors were often incorporated within the melting pot of ethnic roles, they were rarely granted access to white American leading roles.¹⁶⁵ This, combined with the sheer variety of different parts played by Latin American stars like Vélez leads me to contend that at this time, Mexicans and other Latin Americans were most often cast within Hollywood’s ‘ethnic’ category. However, as with all attempts to define matters of identity, this categorical distinction remains blurred, artificial and indefinable. In discussing ethnicity I seek not to establish any definitive classification but rather to retain a sense of the impossibility of making clear divisions, while at the same time emphasising that the lived experiences and on-screen representations of people occupying different ethnic spaces were (and remain) radically different as a direct result of ethnicity.

The Mexican characters in *Borderline* are portrayed in terms of immobility, which is set in contrast to the excessive movement of the American protagonists. As in chapter one, the film’s travelling narrative fixes Mexico and Mexicans into place, requiring them to remain primitive and backwards. For example, a Mexican sheriff who assists Haley and McEvoy as they try to make it back to the US is left stuck in the undeveloped Mexican wilderness by the film. Outwitted by Haley and McEvoy, he unknowingly aids their escape to Ensenada, a town near the border, while he is left trapped at a tiny airstrip in the countryside. The Mexican police too are physically immobile in the film. Although they are presented as efficient and professional, they are forced to await McEvoy’s instructions in order to catch one of the gangsters, despite the fact that the investigation has taken place in Mexico. As McEvoy leaves Ensenada in order to finish the job by pursuing the American side of the smuggling ring, these Mexican officers must remain in Mexico, even though the US police officers have travelled back and forth across the border and all through Mexico in the course of the investigation.

These characters, along with the Mexican landscape, are depicted as historical artefacts, stuck in a less modern, more traditional way of life than that of the United

¹⁶⁴ Francisco Arturo Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1997), 252.

¹⁶⁵ For a history of Mexican experiences of assimilation in the US see Edward E. Telles and Vilma Ortiz, *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican Americans, Assimilation, and Race* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008).

States. In the Mexican countryside the roads are small, dusty tracks, where donkeys compete with rusty motorcars for space. The landscape is undeveloped, and is dotted with primitive villages of small huts and farm animals. Technological infrastructure is limited to single telephone wires on precarious poles, and ramshackle buildings of wood and corrugated sheeting serve as houses. The towns are not bustling metropolitan centres but sleepy backwaters, where the Americans' car is the only traffic. As noted above, Ellena Dell'Agnese has argued that in its depiction of Mexico and Mexicans, *Borderline* is 'quite racist.' She claims that '[t]he Mexicans are constantly depicted as *estúpido* and sleepy, or, if awake, as distracted by some triviality rather than doing their job properly.'¹⁶⁶ When Miguel (José Torvay), the 'sleepy' Mexican Dell'Agnese describes, is referred to as 'sleeping' by Haley, he is in fact dead. The moment serves to highlight Haley's stereotyping of Miguel within the story, rather than to demonstrate that Mexicans are lazy. Although the depiction of Mexico is certainly not particularly positive, by simply labelling it as racist, Dell'Agnese misses an opportunity to understand how the film's representative strategies operate. Mexico is shown through the language of fixity, as a country and people stuck in place and time, in sharp contrast with the modern technologies of the American travellers who move around Mexico and back and forth across the border with easy mobility. Unlike the Americans who have the freedom to transform themselves and to change identities as they wish, the Mexicans are rooted in their stock roles and cannot engage in the same performance and masquerade.

Hollywood studios were highly attuned to issues around the representation of different national identities at the time *Borderline* was produced, and were working closely with the Motion Picture Export Association and Hollywood's self-regulatory body the Production Code Administration (PCA), organisations which policed movies' adherence to the Motion Picture Production Code and ensured products were suitable for export to foreign markets. Alongside its remit to monitor images of sex, violence and amorality, at this time the PCA was engaged with 'equal fervour,' according to Dale Adams, in improving images of Latin Americans in Hollywood films.¹⁶⁷ In the early 1950s, the United States and Mexico were becoming increasingly interconnected, and after the end of the Second World War, the Good Neighbor policy of the Roosevelt

¹⁶⁶ Dell'Agnese, 'The US-Mexico Border,' 20.

¹⁶⁷ Dale Adams, 'Saludos Amigos: Hollywood and FDR's Good Neighbor Policy,' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24(3) (2007): 291.

administration generally still pervaded relations between the two countries.¹⁶⁸ During the war, the Office of the Co-ordinator for Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) had encouraged positive depictions of Latin America in US films in order to ‘keep the hemispheres united in common cause.’¹⁶⁹ The PCA played a key role in this mission, and was tasked with policing offensive images of other nations and nationalities in film.¹⁷⁰ Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, clause ten of the Production Code ‘continued to require that neither foreign nationals nor the history of their countries be defamed.’¹⁷¹ Alfred Richard has argued that the PCA was at its most effective between 1935 and 1955, and that during this time, it ‘affected every [Latin American image] portrayed.’¹⁷² The PCA’s involvement in screening productions could result in anything from the extension of shooting schedules to the complete rejection of scripts. In addition to the hangover of good neighborly motives, Hollywood also had an economic impetus in ensuring that films would sell in Latin America as it was fast becoming one of the industry’s most important foreign markets, and this is perhaps the key reason why the work of the PCA continued with such fervour well beyond the war.

According to Richard, during its production, *Borderline*’s scenario caused ‘significant problems’ for the PCA with its focus on cross-border drug trade.¹⁷³ The censors were also concerned about the film ‘characterizing one of the Mexicans as “lecherous” and the possibility that Fred was becoming more familiar with the lady’s anatomy than with where the bads were in Mexico.’¹⁷⁴ The movie that made it to screens in the US and also in Mexico (as *Trafico de Muerte*)¹⁷⁵ is more focused on developing the relationship between the two leads than the drug trafficking and centres on the American criminals’ lecherousness rather than leery Mexicans. Ultimately, it is likely the fact that the criminals are a cross-border consortium of both US and Mexican gangsters that persuaded the PCA to approve the film; both countries are implicated equally in criminality in the film, even though it is the US police officers and institutions that crack the case and solve the crime.

¹⁶⁸ Ian Roxborough, ‘Mexico,’ in *Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, ed. Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 190-216.

¹⁶⁹ Alfred Charles Richard, Jr, *Censorship and Hollywood’s Hispanic Image: An Interpretive Filmography, 1936-1955* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), xxix.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, xvi.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, xxi.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 410.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 410.

¹⁷⁵ See Emilio García Riera, *México Visto Por el Cine Extranjero 4: 1941/1969: Filmografía* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1988), 60.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the representation of Mexico as a romanticised space in *Borderline*, and has argued that travelling across the border enables the American protagonists to playfully transform themselves and perform multiple, shifting identities. It began from the premise that historical efforts to depict the international divide can inform understandings of the way in which the border is represented in the film; historically, the border's over-wrought textual representations call attention to the fact that there is no real world referent to which the boundary refers. Instead, the border is formed upon other representations, and is ultimately an unfixable entity. Similarly, in *Borderline* the boundary is presented only through symbols and absence, hinting at the unrepresentable nature of this division.

Identity is marked as flexible for the travelling Americans in the film, and it becomes a performance and masquerade that they can enact at will. It is through travelling and performing various different identities that the protagonists find themselves and fall in love, their romance playing out against the changing romanticised Mexican backdrops. This plays in sharp contrast to the plight of the Mexican characters who are firmly fixed into place and trapped as if in a distant historical period. While the American characters enjoy the freedom of the continent and are able to take on any persona they wish, it is a different story for the Mexicans who remain stuck in their stock roles. As in the film, in Hollywood at large, the power to choose different, changing identities was only granted to white Americans, leaving Mexicans and actors of other backgrounds restricted to certain categories of roles. This understanding of ethnicity flattened difference at the same time as it restricted non-white actors to a fixed set of parts which were often indeterminately 'ethnic.' Although the PCA was working hard at this time to ensure that individual Latin American characters moved away from crude caricatures, the wider approach to ethnicity in Hollywood was one that served to strengthen the distinction between white and ethnic actors.

Through its travelling narrative, *Borderline*'s depiction of border crossings articulates the US' relationship with Mexico in terms of mobility and travel. As a space which enables Americans to construct identities for themselves, this romantic vision also preserves and fixes Mexico into place. As unstable constructs, identity and the

border itself play out the instability of *Borderline*'s depiction of American imperialism. The tensions between the depiction of co-operative police work and the film's clear concern with delineating the differences between the countries also attests to the complexity of the relationship between the US and Mexico in the Cold War. It was vitally important for the United States to secure its southern neighbour as an ally, and yet the country below the border with its recent revolutionary past seemed receptive to communist ideals and harboured many communist exiles against American government wishes.

American dominance over Mexico in the film is therefore played out through a mobile/static dialectic, running across issues of identity, technology, and travel. Rather than simply serving as a 'foil for displays of American superiority' or the 'last frontier of the United States' as Carlos Cortés and David Maciel have suggested, the cinematic border operates on a more complex level as part of a discourse which I argue constitutes a negotiation of the relationship between the US and Mexico during the Cold War.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, the next chapter will argue that for *Wetbacks*, border crossing calls into question imperial practices at work in American representations of Mexico. Ideas of mobility are also crucial, as the chapter sees Americans travel south of the border at the same time as Mexicans attempt to head north into the United States. The film's Mexican backdrops articulate a tropical and exoticised vision of the country and the chapter continues investigating the ways in which Mexico is romanticised in American film.

¹⁷⁶ Cortés, 'Neighbor,' 95; Maciel, *El Norte*, 83.

Chapter Three

Danger, Disappearance and the Exotic: American Travellers and Mexican Migrants in *Wetbacks* (1956)

The subject of wetbacks has made front page news stories recently in papers throughout the country. Check your files and make a montage of blowups of wetback news clips from local dailies.¹⁷⁷

This instruction to exhibitors of Hank McCune's 1956 film *Wetbacks* suggests that the movie be tied into the regular news stories about Mexican migrants found in the press.¹⁷⁸ A common technique used by exhibitors at the time, this appeal to the real life stories of undocumented migrants demonstrates that the filmmakers understood their movie to be one that linked directly to these current events. The 1950s saw a great intensification in the number of border crossings into the US from Mexico. The Bracero Program, established to draft in Mexican labourers to the US south during the war, continued to run throughout the decade. It marked the formalisation of a process which had been on-going since the late nineteenth century in which Mexican workers would seasonally migrate across the border to work in the US, creating circular migratory flows.¹⁷⁹ The introduction of the Program meant the effective creation of 'legal' Mexican workers, but alongside the several hundred thousand official border crossers, undocumented immigration also began to increase, and at a much greater rate. The only reliable figures available for this type of migration are the number of undocumented migrants caught and deported by authorities, and according to Kitty Calavita, '[i]n 1949, when there were 107,000 braceros, the [Immigration and Naturalization Service] apprehended slightly over twice that many undocumented workers.'¹⁸⁰

Undocumented migrants continued to grow in number because it was a faster, easier way for Mexicans to enter the US instead of waiting for a bracero permit to be granted. Powerful business leaders in southern states began to rely on this

¹⁷⁷ *Wetbacks* press pack, British Film Institute National Archive, 1956, n.pag.

¹⁷⁸ The title of the film and the use of the term 'Wetbacks' in press and academic writing of the cold war period demonstrates the prevalence of this label at this time. It is a highly pejorative term which refers to those who have crossed into the United States from Mexico through the Rio Grande.

¹⁷⁹ Lorey, *U.S.-Mexican Border*, 121.

¹⁸⁰ Calavita, *Inside the State*, 32.

undocumented labour, as these migrants were even cheaper and easier to control than official braceros. Because of the businesses' influence in local politics, the US Border Patrol regularly turned a blind eye to undocumented migrants during harvest time and other periods of peak production in the farming calendar.¹⁸¹ Critics of the Bracero Program on both sides of the border 'charged numerous abuses,' including the withholding of wages, forced deportation after work was completed, and unsafe working conditions for documented and undocumented workers alike.¹⁸² As David Lorey has argued, while it formalised the historical seasonal migration of Mexican workers, the Bracero Program also encouraged the notion that 'Mexican workers could be returned to Mexico when they were no longer needed'.¹⁸³

US opinion was divided on the issue of bracero workers at this time. For agricultural and businesses leaders, they were seen as more or less essential to industry in the south. But a restrictionist sentiment opposed to the presence of both undocumented and documented migrants was also growing among other parts of the community local to the border and on a national level. Since the Great Depression, restrictionism had been a major force in the US, stemming from anti-immigration fears and a belief that Mexican workers were driving down wages and taking jobs from American citizens. In line with this anti-immigrant feeling, Joseph Nevins reports that 'US authorities forcibly expelled an estimated 415,000 Mexicans between 1929 and 1935, with another 85,000 leaving "voluntarily," usually under intense pressure from local authorities.'¹⁸⁴ With ever increasing numbers of undocumented migrants and growing public pressure, the 1950s saw the organised and militarised mass deportation of Mexicans. Manuel Gonzales argues that the immigration service's 'Operation Wetback' was 'conducted as a military operation' and made use of 'intimidation tactics' resulting in the apprehension and expulsion of over 1 million people in 1954 alone.¹⁸⁵ In a more historicised analysis of these events, John Garcia contends that this understanding of Mexican labour as temporary and wholly disposable is connected to the concept of manifest destiny and the United States' perceived right to expansion.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁸² Lorey, *U.S.-Mexican Border*, 122.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 121.

¹⁸⁴ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper*, 38.

¹⁸⁵ Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 180.

Garcia claims that in the mid-twentieth century US, the sole ‘role of the Mexican-origin population was that of a reserved labor pool, an elastic labor source.’¹⁸⁶

During the Cold War, the American media regularly covered the news of the government’s efforts to deport undocumented migrants, and press attention tended to focus on reports which stressed the negative impact of Mexican workers on the US. In response to the suggestions of *Wetbacks*’ press pack, the kinds of clippings that theatre owners may have put together to promote the film would likely have included stories about Mexican workers driving down wages and taking jobs from US residents. In 1956 newspapers reported that undocumented migration was being tackled fairly effectively and being reduced, but the presence of Mexican workers in the country, whether they had work permits or not, was seen as a larger problem.¹⁸⁷ Papers were full of allegations that the bracero program was simply ‘a device for avoiding the paying of adequate wages to citizen workers,’¹⁸⁸ and the *New York Times* ran a five-part series which blamed undocumented migration for lowering wages for US citizens.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, a 1956 academic article entitled, ‘A Critical Analysis of the Wetback Problem’ puts the presence of Mexican contract workers at the heart of the US’s employment problems.¹⁹⁰ Mexican workers were perceived to be the root cause of American unemployment and low wages, and this was one of the key issues related to Mexican migration that featured in the American national press during the period of *Wetbacks*’ production.

This chapter continues the analysis of Mexico as a romanticised site developed in chapters one and two. Unlike *Where Danger Lives* and *Borderline*, *Wetbacks*’ story features two-way border traffic as Americans travel to Mexico at the same time as Mexicans attempt to head north of the border. The romantic backdrop of Mexico again plays host to a romantic encounter between the American leads, but in contrast to the films in chapters one and two, for *Wetbacks* travelling to Mexico is a dangerous yet exotic pursuit. This romanticised Mexican backdrop marks a stark contrast with the grimly realistic approach taken in the film’s marketing. The first section of the chapter will examine the role of the border in *Wetbacks*, arguing that it acts as a gateway to

¹⁸⁶ Garcia, ‘Chicano Movement,’ 87.

¹⁸⁷ See for example, ‘Flaws are noted in “Wetback” Curb: Traffic only a “Trickle,” but Abuses Persist on Farms, Texas Unions Assert,’ *New York Times*, 28 August 1955, 55.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁸⁹ Calavita, *Inside the State*, 47.

¹⁹⁰ Eleanor M. Hadley, ‘A Critical Analysis of the Wetback Problem,’ *Law and Contemporary Problems* 21 (2) (1956): 334-357.

danger and disappearance for the film's American hero. It will contrast the cinematic representation of the boundary with the portrayal of the movie's border crossings offered in publicity and marketing materials, contending that the film's border responds to the language of floods and invasion which pervades press accounts of this time. The second section of the chapter investigates the contemporary context of cultural understandings of Mexico as an exotic space. For *Wetbacks*, the Mexican location is primitive, untouched and exotic, but unlike the films examined in the first two chapters, here Mexico becomes a dangerous place for American tourists. This section analyses the exoticisation of Mexico as an imperial process, and argues that the Mexican landscape is overwritten with a generalised American tropical vision. The final section of the chapter will examine *Wetbacks* in the context of international relations between the US and Mexico at this time. It argues that the film's metaphorical border crossings, which foreground the threats of danger and disappearance in Mexico, enact questions about the imperial nature of the relationship between the two countries in the Cold War as American fears and desires are written upon the Mexican landscape. This section of the chapter will also consider the production circumstances of the movie, including the personal politics of star Lloyd Bridges. Ahead of part three of the thesis which focuses on this idea in more detail, I suggest here that the cinematic spaces of Mexico and the border become politically potent sites during this period.

Border crossing, migrant discourses and danger

Wetbacks tells the story of Jim Benson (Bridges), an American fisherman who is out of work and out of cash. Benson's position is exploited by the US immigration authorities who, unbeknownst to him, use him to entrap a gang of criminals smuggling Mexican workers into the United States. The immigration services' undercover officers leave Benson penniless and stuck in a small Mexican village, while the Mexican gang members pursue him violently and mercilessly. When they realise their plan has gone awry, the US officials begin to flounder, and it is Benson's close connections with the local Mexican community that enable him to make his escape by sea. At the end of the film, the US coastguard returns to save the day and capture the smugglers, while Benson returns home with his financial troubles behind him and undercover officer Sally Parker (Nancy Gates) on his arm. Border crossings play a key symbolic role in the narrative, signifying Benson's entry into a world full of deceit, corruption and threat.

As detailed above, *Wetbacks*' producers and marketers were careful to make explicit the connections between the movie's subject matter and contemporary debates around Mexican migration. However, the film does not dwell on the lives or story of the Mexicans who attempt to reach US soil, and they receive very little screen time within the picture. Rather, the perceived threat of invasion by these undocumented Mexican migrants is negotiated through the dangerous journey Benson makes across the border and back again. The somewhat amorphous hazards which Mexican migrants might present to the US are played out in the dangers Benson faces in his journey to Mexico. From the economic peril he faces at the beginning of the movie, to the prospect of physical violence and entrapment in the Mexican coastal village of Delgado, Benson eventually combats these dangers and the criminals are captured by US forces, while prospective migrants are returned to their side of the border.

From the very beginning of the film, *Wetbacks* presents the border between the US and Mexico as open and permeable. Facing mounting debts at his marina, Benson is offered a fee to take an American tourist and his female companion fishing. As they set out to sea, the customers and Benson agree to head for Mexico, down along the coast towards rich fishing areas. One of the most intriguing elements of the film is its very unusual depiction of the border. In contrast to the other movies analysed in this thesis, in *Wetbacks*, border crossings take place at sea, and the point at which the international boundary is traversed is not revealed. Paralleling the watery sea borders imagined in the film, a striking discourse of water was used to describe Mexican migration in American popular press and governmental speeches at this time. Newspapers describe how a 'tide of Mexican "wetback" workers' 'illegally streamed' into the US and detail the immigration service's efforts to 'shut off the flow,' and 'stem the tide'.¹⁹¹ Invoking the raw power of oceans and rivers, these descriptions create an image of the migrants as an unstoppable, destructive force. Through the same language, Mexicans are also figured as slippery and able to sneak through the tiniest breach in US defences. However, there is little evidence to suggest that any significant numbers of undocumented Mexicans travelled by sea rather than overland at this time. The movie's insistent depiction of the smuggling of migrants by boat around the coast is thus intriguingly inaccurate, suggesting instead a metaphorical concern with the 'tides' of

¹⁹¹ Gladwin Hill, 'Wetback Ousting by Airlift Revived: Action by Congress Remedies Shortage of Funds,' *New York Times*, 13 June 1952, 11; Hadley, 'Wetback Problem,' 334; 'Wetback Bill Approved: House Judiciary Committee Will Report Search Measure,' *New York Times*, 25 January 1952, 9; 'Wetback Action Planned: Mexican President Asserts New Lands Will be Cultivated,' *New York Times*, 2 September 1953, 18.

migrants entering the country over land which taps into media and public discourses around migration and immigration.

In the film the ocean is shown in extended long shots as the characters travel south stopping intermittently to fish; there are no markers or boundary lines on either the vast expanses of water or the coastlines along which they travel. In the previous chapter I argued that *Borderline*'s symbolic threshold fell outside of existing critical writings about the representation of the US-Mexico border in cultural texts. Claire Fox's assertion that 'the fence and the river' are the key ways in which the boundary is depicted did not consider the absence of the boundary in cultural representations.¹⁹² For *Wetbacks* too, the US-Mexico border is an unmarked, indeterminate place. The film's border crossings take place at sea, and the sheer uncontainable expanse of ocean which fills the filmic space during the journey south into Mexican waters presents an unwieldy, powerful force of nature. The invisibility of the border also highlights the artificiality of the international boundary, and its absence from texts such as *Wetbacks* is at least as significant as its presence in physical forms such as fences and rivers in others. The permeability and indefinable nature of this sea border echoes the constant shifting of the border as river described in chapter two.

The film's second border crossing also takes place at sea, and a significant proportion of the overall action is nautical. After his passengers alight in Delgado, the narrative quickly returns to the waves as Benson is forced by the criminal gang to make a 'wetback' run. After dropping his cargo north of the border, he returns to Delgado once again, and is pursued around the village by the smugglers before a final seaborne showdown. In a tense sequence both boats circle around a huge ocean liner, attempting to shoot at and capsize one another. Benson's plan is to get the criminals to chase him into US waters. However, there is no indication as to where this watery border might lie and the fact that they have arrived in American waters is only finally signalled when the coastguard appears. Emphasising this indefinable and permeable sea border, *Wetbacks* depicts a United States besieged by the threat from Mexican migration. The immigration officials' warning that the Mexicans can cross the border 'by land, by air, and by water, and maybe even underground' highlights the extent of the threat that they perceive. Here the US-Mexico border falls on murky and indeterminate lines in the ever-undulating ocean.

¹⁹² Fox, *Fence and River*, 50.

Wetbacks' publicity poster presents a significantly different image of border crossings compared to those within the film. The scene which the poster depicts takes place entirely outside of the cinematic narrative and taps into another prevalent contemporary discourse around migration. Speeches by government officials and civil society groups regularly drew on a language of warlike invasion and suppression. In 1955, Immigration Commissioner Joseph M. Swing declared the 'wetback invasion' under control for 'the first time since before World War II.'¹⁹³ Similarly, articles in the press regularly drew on metaphors of infiltration, describing, for example, an 'annual invasion' and 'Wetback influx'.¹⁹⁴ In a paper written by the Texas GI Forum and farm unions entitled 'What Price Wetbacks?' the alleged invasive nature of Mexican migrants is underlined as they are described as:

motivated by the desire to get to the urban and industrial areas of the northern, northcentral and western areas of the country where the possibility of detection and apprehension by immigration authorities is slim and where earnings are larger.¹⁹⁵

Fears that Mexicans would overrun and penetrate deep into the heart of the US construct the migrants as an infiltrating and infecting force attacking the country and its citizens.

Wetbacks' poster features a gunman in official uniform. His barrel is pointed at a figure lurching through water towards him with hands outstretched, apparently having been shot. The man in the water has an ambiguous facial expression which seems contorted with pain. With straw hat and scruffy shirt, he is clearly marked as a Mexican worker, as are the other people in the water and on the boat. The gunman faces away from the viewer, but his hat and uniform are an exact match for a smaller inset in the poster which features Bridges. Although Benson never apprehends or shoots any Mexican workers in the film, the poster's scene does hold echoes of the film's opening sequence. The first shots of the movie are set apart visually through the stylised use of chiaroscuro. *Wetbacks* opens at night on a dark beach as two headlights pull up towards the camera. A man gets out of the car and looks out across the dark sea, when from this blackness come figures, illuminated by the headlights, swaying and grappling like inhuman monsters. They head straight toward the camera, arms outstretched.

¹⁹³ 'Drive on Wetbacks Termed a Success,' *New York Times*, 10 March 1955, 29.

¹⁹⁴ Gladwin Hill, 'Wetback Invasion is Broadening Despite all U.S. Counter-Moves,' *New York Times*, 11 February 1952, 12; Gladwin Hill, 'Wetback Influx Moves Westward: Two States Have Record Job Rush by Mexicans,' *New York Times*, 9 October 1953, 40.

¹⁹⁵ GI Forum of Texas and Texas State Federation of Labor, *What Price Wetbacks?* (Austin: GI Forum of Texas, 1953), 6, quoted in Hadley, 'Wetback Problem,' 335.

Following the arrival of the coastguard, a criminal emerging from the boat shoots at the US officers, killing one. The action then cuts to the title ‘Wetbacks,’ which is splashed dramatically across the screen and accompanied by tense and overwrought music reminiscent of horror film scores.

The publicity poster differs from this opening sequence in important ways. Diverging from the narrative of the movie, the poster positions Bridges with the gun, shooting at Mexicans. The border crossing depicted in the poster is that of an invasive threat to the US, as monstrous migrants reach out threateningly towards the viewer. This threat is met with a military response, and the poster frames the film’s narrative with the idea that Bridges’ character and US forces are at war with the Mexican migrants. Overwritten with mythology and metaphor, in both the film and its poster, the border becomes a symbolic threshold, tapping into discourses of tides and floods on the one hand and invasion and war on the other.

Exotic tourism, tropical Mexico and imperial re-mappings

As discussed in detail in chapter one, the 1950s saw a massive boom in US tourism to Mexico. The American press was full of stories about the new tropical resorts opening in Acapulco and across the Yucatán Peninsula, and stressed the fact that a tropical break in Mexico was now affordable even for average American families.¹⁹⁶ Through these exotic resorts, Mexico became understood as a comparable equivalent to Caribbean tropical paradises that was cheaper, easier to get to and just as glamorous.¹⁹⁷ Exoticness is also an important factor in *Wetbacks*’ vision of Mexico as well as in the movie’s reception upon its release. The film’s publicity materials specifically highlight its tropical theme, describing it as a ‘romance under tropical skies’ and emphasise the fact it was shot on a ‘magnetic Island paradise’.¹⁹⁸ Contemporary reviewers of the film did not always find much to like, but were unanimous in their praise of the exotic locations and the Eastman Color process which rendered them ‘so beautiful’ according

¹⁹⁶ See Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood, eds., *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), particularly Andrew Sackett’s chapter, ‘Fun in Acapulco? The Politics of Development on the Mexican Riviera,’ 161-182.

¹⁹⁷ Rebecca Torres and Janet Henshall Momsen, ‘Gringolandia: Cancún and the American Tourist,’ in *Adventures into Mexico: American Tourism Beyond the Border*, ed. Nicholas Dagen Bloom (Lanham and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 59. Chapter seven of the thesis explores the role of Hollywood stars in glamorising such Mexican resorts.

¹⁹⁸ *Wetbacks* press pack.

to *Harrison's Reports*.¹⁹⁹ For *Kine Weekly*, the '[m]agnificent land and seascapes further compensate for its uneven script. You can feel the sun on your back and taste the salt in the air.'²⁰⁰ Similarly, *Variety* found the film had 'excellent scenic footage' which complemented the 'tropical mood'.²⁰¹

The fact that *Wetbacks* was filmed in Eastman Color was significant in creating its tropical atmosphere. The Eastman Color system was initially introduced in 1951 and by the mid-1950s it had overtaken the Technicolor process to become the 'industry standard'.²⁰² Reviewers of early Eastman films found the colour system variously to be 'unreal,' with a 'predominance of vivid blues' and a tone that gave 'the players at times a super tropical tan.'²⁰³ *Wetbacks'* reviewers certainly singled out the colour system as a positive and defining feature of the film, and the strong blues and tropical tans perhaps gave the movie an even more lush and exotic edge. Unfortunately no Eastman Color version appears to survive to view today. However, a reconstructed still from the film featured on the DVD packaging shows Bridges and Gates in front of an ocean of blazing reds, oranges and yellows, giving a glimpse of the kind of evocative, exotic and tropical colours the film may originally have commanded.

According to trade press reports, the film's producer-director McCune changed the name of his company from Telecraft Productions to Pacific Coast Pictures specifically for the production of *Wetbacks*.²⁰⁴ With this name change, McCune automatically created a connection between the ostensibly Mexican setting of the film and the Pacific Islands. The fact that location filming took place both in Mexico and on Catalina Island in the Pacific, despite the absence of any islands in the film, demonstrates the movie's conceptual interchangeability of Mexico and tropical island locations.²⁰⁵ *Wetbacks'* positioning of Mexico as a tropical paradise opens it up to US colonisation, in the words of Raymond Betts, producing an 'illusionary' Mexico which

¹⁹⁹ Rev. of *Wetbacks*, *Harrison's Reports*, 3 March 1956, 34.

²⁰⁰ Rev. of *Wetbacks*, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 9 January 1958, 30.

²⁰¹ Rev. of *Wetbacks*, *Variety*, 7 March 1956, 6.

²⁰² Doulgas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 245.

²⁰³ Lev lists early Eastman Color pictures in *Fifties*, 108. The quotations come from reviews of three such early films, *Hurricane Island* (Lew Landers, 1952), *Sunny Side of the Street* (Richard Quine, 1951) and *The Sword of Monte Cristo* (Maurice Geraghty, 1951): Rev. of *Hurricane Island*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 19 (216) (1952): 51; Rev. of *Sunny Side of the Street*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 19 (216) (1952): 54; Rev. of *Sword of Monte Cristo*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 18 (204) (1951): 350.

²⁰⁴ *The Hollywood Reporter*, 3 May 1955, 5.

²⁰⁵ Hollywood has a long tradition of this kind of tropical conflation, for example, W. S. Van Dyke's 1928 feature, *White Shadows in the South Seas*, was set on the Pacific Island of Tahiti, but Mexican actress Raquel Torres was called in to play the lead Tahitian role. See Jeffrey Geiger, 'Imagined Islands: "White Shadows in the South Seas" and Cultural Ambivalence,' *Cinema Journal* 41 (3) (2002): 107.

is constructed entirely by the colonising nation.²⁰⁶ Jeffrey Geiger has examined the representation of the Pacific Islands in Hollywood film, and argues that these depictions are never simply concerned with demonstrating exoticness, but rather are always bound up with colonial discourses. In relation to *White Shadows in the South Seas* (W. S. Van Dyke, 1928), he posits that ‘the film is self-reflexively gesturing toward the historical textualisation of the Pacific as a site of western fantasy: an impossible Eden glimpsed among the colonized tropics.’²⁰⁷ Thus for Geiger, representations of Pacific island paradises are overlaid with the self-conscious construction of western fantasies, and it is these American fantasies of tropicalism which are also inscribed upon the illusionary Mexican landscape of *Wetbacks*.

Wetbacks’ reinscribing of Mexican terrain plays out the distinctly spatial and geographic processes by which colonialism operates. As Edward Said has argued, ‘[i]mperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control.’²⁰⁸ Similarly, Cole Harris claims that the act of mapping is one of the most powerful tools of colonisation; in the Americas colonial maps reorganised space in Eurocentric perspective, renaming, removing and ignoring ‘indigenous ways of knowing and recording space’.²⁰⁹ Rather than finding anything specifically Mexican about the setting of the film, the production company and reviewers alike understood its landscape as a denationalised tropical and exotic space. Taking the Mexican out of Mexico, the film re-maps the surface of the country with a homogenous tropical environment, explicitly highlighting the fact that many of the scenes were filmed elsewhere. Through its illusionary tropical vision of Mexico, *Wetbacks*, like *White Shadows in the South Seas* before it, gestures towards American colonisation and construction of Mexico.

This overwriting of Mexico is particularly apparent during the film’s scenes set in the drab immigration service offices. Two items on the walls of the set draw attention to themselves. One, a large map, shows the United States and northern Mexico. In this map, the US is detailed with the reliefs of mountains and valleys, creating a complex and visually beautiful cartography. In contrast, the terrain of Mexico is entirely blank, coloured in one tone and lacking any distinguishing marks.

²⁰⁶ Betts argues that the ‘purifying gaze of the Hollywood lens strove to construct the South Pacific as an illusionary island.’ Raymond F. Betts, ‘The Illusionary Island: Hollywood’s Pacific Place,’ *East-West Film Journal* 5 (2) (1991): 41.

²⁰⁷ Geiger, ‘Imagined Islands,’ 110.

²⁰⁸ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 271.

²⁰⁹ Harris, ‘Colonialism,’ 175.

Although this map is presumably designed to aid the immigration service in their patrol of the border, it lacks any identifying features on the Mexican side of the line. Mexico is vacant and silenced, erased and ready to be overwritten by Americans with their own fantasies of what lies beneath the borderline. On the wall directly next to this map, and behind the American officers, a calendar hangs conspicuously, and appears to feature an image of a tropical island. In his examination of the construction of Hawaii's paradise image in the early twentieth century, DeSoto Brown argues that the fantasy was produced in large part through the advertising strategies of American industry.²¹⁰ Employed by cruise liner companies, hotels and Hollywood alike, fantasy images of Hawaii were constructed to sell to Americans. The appearance of the tropical calendar in the US immigration service office highlights both the all-pervasive nature of these tropical fantasies in American culture but also hints at the action to come in *Wetbacks*. The calendar foreshadows the film's construction of a fantasy paradise and confirms Mexico's position within the diegesis as a space overwritten with American tropicalism.

Exotic tropicality is the overriding theme of the film's Mexican topography. In the village of Delgado where Benson and Parker are stranded, most of the action takes place in a bar owned by Alfonso (Nacho Galindo) which has the appearance of a simple shack or beach hut. The tropical atmosphere of the bar is enhanced by the presence of foliage and the exotic plants and trees seen outside through the open sides of the room. As Benson and Parker sit drinking together, the open panels behind them reveal palm trees and the ocean beyond. The tropical scene is fixed behind the couple, framing their romance in exotic terms, and later in the evening while the bar staff fall asleep, the Americans talk into the night, accompanied by a guitarist, whose slow, sliding melody reveals a Hawaiian influence.²¹¹ Much of the rest of the action in Mexico happens aboard Benson's ship, with the sea and sky reaching out into the background, presumably stunning in vivid Eastman Color. In *Wetbacks*, the illusionary exotic Mexican landscape is inextricably linked to the growing romantic relationship between the protagonists, and provides a space where the exotic can also become erotic.

²¹⁰ DeSoto Brown, 'Beautiful, Romantic Hawaii: How the Fantasy Image Came to Be,' *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 20 (1994): 252-271.

²¹¹ As Brown explains, '[t]he soon-to-be-famous ukulele (originally a Portuguese instrument) was joined by the guitar, tuned in a special manner and often played with a metal bar that produced a unique sliding sound. This came to be known as the steel guitar, and for millions of people all over the world only its tones qualify as "Hawaiian music."' Ibid., 253.

Colonialism and the border

Emerging from the context of changing concerns about the presence of Mexican workers and particularly their effects on the US job market, *Wetbacks* was produced at a time when the US's broader relationship with Mexico was also undergoing transition. During the Second World War, the United States had sought to bolster relations with the rest of Latin America in order to build allegiances and ensure that the countries did not fall to fascism. President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy acted on diplomatic, political and cultural fronts. During and immediately following the Second World War, relationships within the hemisphere were strong. Historian Stewart Brewer has argued that at this time, 'the United States and Latin America entered a period of cooperation, cordial associations, and mutual goodwill unlike anything in the history of US-Latin American relations.'²¹² In the aftermath of the war which saw the emergence of the US and the Soviet Union as ideologically opposed nuclear superpowers, the US implemented a further foreign policy programme to build alliances. The Truman Doctrine was introduced in order to ensure that weakened allies would not fall to the growing threat of communism. Brewer attests that with this measure, President Truman claimed 'any country in the world that was threatened by communist expansion could expect aid from the United States in the form of funding and military support.'²¹³ Through this doctrine, the Marshall Plan delivered \$13 billion of funding to help rebuild vulnerable countries hit by the war. But in the end all of this support went to Europe, and as Brewer contends, Latin American countries became increasingly frustrated that none of the money came their way.²¹⁴

In addition to a burgeoning antipathy towards the United States in Latin America, the 1950s also saw the growth of popular left-wing social movements in many Latin American countries. US policymakers were late to look to the state of their own continent after the war. However when they finally did take stock of the situation, 'they were astonished to discover popular movements in rural Latin American communities and among Latin American politicians alike that looked like communism.'²¹⁵ Latin American countries held long histories of communism and communist sympathies, and

²¹² Stewart Brewer, *Borders and Bridges: A History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Westport and London: Praeger Security international, 2006), 112.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 115.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 115. It is important to note that the US government was using a very broad definition of communism at this time, and many of these Latin American movements were similar in ideology and ethos to the policies of US's own New Deal era.

after intervening to oust the government in Guatemala in 1954, the US watched over left-wing politics in Latin America with great interest during this period.²¹⁶ 1954 brought an end to Senator McCarthy's strident anticommunism internally and as a result, 'public hysteria about domestic communism, no longer so openly fuelled by demagogic politicians, died down.'²¹⁷ Jonathan Auerbach argues that by the mid-1950s, public concern about 'an internal red menace' was diminishing as a result of McCarthy's demise, but also because of the increasing prominence of other issues such as race relations: 1954 also saw the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling which brought an end to segregated schools and formed a key milestone in the civil rights movement.²¹⁸ At this point in time attention was focused as much on the rise of communism outside the US as internally.

Connected to the invading tide of migrants found in press stories and public discourse of the time, it is also significant that the Mexican workers in *Wetbacks* are marked as communist characters. They are always shown on screen as a collective and are completely unindividualised with blank expressions and bland characters. The Mexicans' communality is presented as a lack of personal agency as they are shown blindly following each other around and placidly taking orders. As M. Keith Booker has argued of the alien invaders in another film released in 1956, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel), in their collectivity and lack of individual personality or emotion, the Mexican migrants 'directly echo the era's most prevalent stereotypes about communists.'²¹⁹ Radicalism and unionism among Mexican migrants was a pertinent topic at this time, and as Calavita has showed, the concerned US government issued direct instructions to farm owners to 'purge the Bracero Program of "agitators."²²⁰ Further evidence of the conflation of migrants with communists is found in a report by Immigration Commissioner Swing, in which he lauds the expulsion of 184 subversives and 266,000 migrants from the country in the very same phrase.²²¹

²¹⁶ George Kennan, 'Latin America as a Problem in U.S. Foreign Policy,' in *Neighborly Adversaries: Readings in U.S.-Latin American Relations*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael J. LaRosa and Frank O. Mora (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 123-134.

²¹⁷ Jonathan Auerbach, *Dark Borders: Film Noir and American Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 187.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 187-188.

²¹⁹ Booker, *Monsters*, 127.

²²⁰ Calavita, *Inside the State*, 78.

²²¹ '184 Subversives in Deported List: Report for Five Years Made by Immigration Service – 5,261 Criminals Ousted,' *New York Times*, 3 January 1955, 8. The Alien Registration Act of 22 June 1940 had already established 'protocols for the registration and deportation of noncitizens with radical affiliations.' Auerbach, *Dark Borders*, 35.

Wetbacks was produced in the context of this changing relationship between the US and Latin America and against the backdrop of the war on communism. Accompanying these broad political shifts, the forces exerting pressures on Hollywood movies were also undergoing great changes. As discussed in chapter two, in line with the earlier government's Good Neighbor policy, since the Second World War the PCA had been instructed to pay special attention to the representation of Latin American countries and people in US films. As a body that previously affected all representations of Latin Americans on screen, by 1956, the PCA had less influence, less authority and less obligation to censor images of different nations and nationalities.²²² Alfred Richard attributes this change to a series of issues, including the breakdown of the studio system and the growth of independent production companies which did not fall under the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America or PCA auspices.²²³ However, the changing relationship between the US and Latin America at a governmental level was likely also an important factor. Richard argues that PCA censorship of depictions of Latin America waned in the latter half of the decade, and it is probable that PCA head Joseph Breen and his office would not have been interested in *Wetbacks*' characterisations of Mexico and Mexicans to the same extent that they were with earlier productions such as *Borderline*.²²⁴ Emilio García Riera notes that unlike many American films made in the 1950s, *Wetbacks* did not have a release in Mexico at all, indicating either that the filmmakers did not want to sell the film overseas, were unable to get distribution, or that the Mexican government censored the picture.²²⁵ Positioned as a tie-in to the topical and typically hostile US news stories about Mexican migration, the filmmakers were clearly not concerned with appealing to the Latin American market with this production. This echoes the wider governmental shift away from good neighborly relations with Mexico and towards the more complex relationship with the country which developed during the Cold War.

Wetbacks was McCune's first film as director, and the first production for his company Pacific Coast Pictures. He had previously produced the melodrama *A Life at Stake* (Paul Guilfoyle, 1954) before embarking on this project as producer and director. One incident relating to the film that received detailed trade press attention was the

²²² Richard, *Censorship*, xxxix-xl.

²²³ *Ibid.*, xxxix-xl.

²²⁴ For a detailed history of Breen and the PCA see Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood's Censor: Joseph I. Breen & the Production Code Administration* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007).

²²⁵ Emilio García Riera, *México Visto por el Cine Extranjero 3: 1941/1969* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1988), 65.

interruption of the production because of a union dispute. McCune was forced to call filming to a halt for weeks until actors received back dated salaries and advances cheques in accordance with their Screen Actors Guild contracts.²²⁶ The activism of the actors and the escalation of the union dispute is perhaps not entirely surprising given star Bridges' political background. Bridges began his acting career on stage, and was a member of the radical theatre group 'The Actors' Lab' in the 1940s.²²⁷ A member of the Communist Party, Bridges was summoned during the HUAC investigations in Hollywood, and agreed to co-operate with the committee by arranging to 'testify in secret'.²²⁸ Jeremy Byman notes that '[t]hough he named names, he was still "graylisted" for several years until the *Sea Hunt* television series revived his career.'²²⁹ *Wetbacks* falls into this greylisted period of Bridges' career, which perhaps explains his presence in what was a considerably low-budget and low-profile production compared to his prestigious pre-HUAC pictures such as *Unconquered* (Cecil B DeMille, 1948) and *High Noon* (Fred Zimmerman, 1952).

Through *Wetbacks*' overwriting of the Mexican landscape with American visions of exotic holiday locations, the imperial relationship between the US and Mexico is brought to the fore. Likewise, US institutions of law and immigration enact precisely the kind of 'informal imperialism' that John Britton identifies as characteristic of US-Latin American relations in the cold war period.²³⁰ Reaching far outside of their jurisdiction, US authorities deploy undercover agents and US citizens across the border in order to draw Mexican criminals onto American turf and arrest them, while Mexican police officers appear as bumbling fools and drunks. Intervening in Mexican affairs in this way, the Americans in the film manage this cross-border and bilateral concern on behalf of both countries without so much as consulting Mexico.

Conclusion

Mexico is represented as a romanticised site in *Wetbacks* through the visual emphasis on the country's tropicality and the self-proclaimed fact it was partly filmed

²²⁶ *Daily Variety*, 24 May 1955; 'Wetbacks,' American Film Institute Catalogue, accessed 20 August 2013, <http://afi.chadwyck.co.uk/home>.

²²⁷ Bruce Newman, 'Lloyd Bridges: Hollywood Family Man,' *TV Guide*, 11 April 1998, 28. See also 'The Life Story of Lloyd Bridges,' *Pictureshow*, 28 March 1953, 12.

²²⁸ Jeremy Byman, *Showdown at High Noon: Witch-hunts, Critics, and the End of the Western* (Lanham and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 92.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

²³⁰ Britton, *Revolution*, 8.

on a tropical island paradise. Unlike the movies analysed in chapters one and two, for *Wetbacks*, crossing the border into Mexico brings explicitly exotic backdrops and danger. Benson narrowly escapes becoming trapped south of the border, as he is left penniless and destitute in a Mexican village, pursued by violent criminal gang members. Again, like the two earlier films, this cinematic border is not a simple reflection of events or policy changes at the real US-Mexico border in this period. Although the film explicitly positions itself in relation to a real-life topical issue in its marketing strategy, its border crossings take place at sea. There is little to no evidence that Mexicans were crossing the US-Mexico border at sea, and therefore the movie's imagined maritime menace seems rather to be metaphorically connected to contemporary discourses around the perceived threat of Mexican migrants. The language used to describe migration and immigration in both press and governmental narratives draws heavily on analogies of water, speaking of tides, flows and floods. It is therefore perhaps not a coincidence that *Wetbacks* takes its border crossings out to sea. Through its permeable, indeterminate boundary the film cannot help but metaphorically invoke this issue, having primed its audiences with precisely these kinds of discourses in the news clippings exhibitors were encouraged to assemble in their theatres to accompany the movie.

The vision of Mexico presented in *Wetbacks* is of a country both dangerous and distinctively exotic. The fact the film was produced on a tropical island is foregrounded in its publicity, and the sea, sand, exotic vegetation and primitive shacks clearly present a tropical backdrop to the action of the movie. The film's overwriting of Mexican spaces with an indeterminate, denationalised exoticism constructs Mexico as the US's own tropical resort, and in this way, American connections with its southern neighbour are rendered colonial. While it adopted a policy of intervening in Latin America for the purpose of preventing the spread of communism in the Cold War, the US government also framed its opposition to the Soviet Union in terms of colonialism.²³¹ In an internal policy statement the US government clearly condemns colonial practices, writing that 'in view of our own history and outlook, [the position of the United States] can only be that we support principles of self-determination'.²³² However, the statement also urges that the 'menace' of the 'Soviet brand of colonialism' be condemned, and that the US should urgently consult and engage with countries including the Latin American nations

²³¹ On the extent of US involvement and influence in Latin America during this period, see for example, Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 10-11. This idea is something that will be returned to in the latter chapters of the thesis.

²³² 'Telegram,' 1 November 1960, 430.

to ‘deliver effective blows at Soviet colonialism.’²³³ *Wetbacks*’ border crossings thus seem to dramatise the United States’ complex cold war relationship with Latin America.

As was the case in chapters one and two, border crossing is also connected to identity transformation in *Wetbacks*. Here, this transformation occurs via Benson’s journey into danger and the threat of disappearance in Mexico, but results in a change in his status and persona as he transforms from loser to hero. Of course, the other characters threatened with disappearance in the movie are the Mexican migrants. As some are shot dead on US beaches, others simply vanish into the cinematic backdrop, and the very lack of attention they receive within the narrative is an act of silencing which eradicates their identities. As I will further illustrate in later chapters, the connection between border crossing and disappearance is a key theme which returns repeatedly across the thesis’ case study films. For the three films analysed in part one of the thesis, moving and travelling form crucial elements of American characters’ stories. In the same way that Haley and Macklin reinvent themselves and find romance through their journey south of the border, Benson triumphs against adversity in Mexico, returning to the US a hero with a girl on his arm.

This first part of the thesis has examined the representation of Mexico as a romantic space in American cinema, and has contended that romanticised visions of Mexican landscapes make explicit the way in which these films figure the United States as an imperial force in Mexico. With very different ideological positions, the three films present different perspectives on border crossing. Mexico is figured as primitive, exotic or dangerous, while its Mexican inhabitants are represented variously as backwards, monstrous or threatening invaders. What has connected the three films is the discourse of colonialism which runs through these different representations. But despite adopting the same terms of debate, the films herein have used ideas of colonialism to proffer a variety of different romantic Mexicos and different political landscapes. Part two of the thesis, comprising chapters four and five, moves on to consider ideas and representations of revolution in border films. It explores how these images of revolutionary Mexico relate to cold war politics, while issues of genre are brought to the fore through an analysis of critical work on the cold war western.

²³³ Ibid., 430.

PART TWO

Revolution: Territory, Nation and Politics

The Revolutionary Politics of Mexico: Vera Cruz (1954) and Representations of Individualism

Mexico's revolutionary history has always held a particular fascination for Hollywood. So much so, that during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, the Mutual Film Corporation secured an exclusive contract with northern-Mexican leader Pancho Villa to cover his campaign.²³⁴ Under the agreement Villa was obliged to fight in daylight where possible, to prevent other crews from filming, and even to restage battles for the cameras if required.²³⁵ Hollywood cinema was taking off at the same time that the revolution took place, and when Mexico appeared in early American cinema, the films almost always featured a revolutionary backdrop.²³⁶ This revolutionary image of Mexico seemed to stick, and since then Hollywood has consistently returned to Mexico's radical past. Both the 1910-1920 Revolution and the Mexican uprising which led to the overthrow of French Emperor Maximilian in 1867 have inspired a multitude of films over the years. This range of movies, from 1939's *Juarez* (William Dieterle) to 1966's *The Professionals*, right up to *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* (Bruce Beresford, 2003), demonstrates the enduring cinematic appeal of revolutionary Mexico.

The 1950s saw a significant preoccupation with Mexico and revolution in Hollywood. A large number of films concerned with forms of Mexican revolution past and present were produced including *Viva Zapata!*, *Salt of the Earth* (Herbert Biberman, 1954), *Border River, Vera Cruz, The Treasure of Pancho Villa* (George Sherman, 1955), *Bandido* (Richard Fleischer, 1956), *Villa!!* (James Clark, 1958) and *They Came to Cordura* (Robert Rossen, 1959). Echoing the explicitly political nature of earlier pictures such as Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished *¡Que Viva México!* (1933), these films all use their images of Mexico or Mexicans to tell political narratives, and each occupies a different position on the political scale. *Viva Zapata!*'s critique of communism in favour of a liberal democracy produces a very different effect than *Salt of the Earth*'s

²³⁴ Cortés, 'Neighbor,' 96-97.

²³⁵ Tim Girven, 'Hollywood's Heterotopia: US Cinema, the Mexican Border and the Making of Tijuana,' *Travesia: Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 3 (1-2) (1994): 101.

²³⁶ Early films about Mexico such as *The Mexican Revolutionist* (George Melford, 1912), *Life of Villa* (Christy Cabanne, 1912), *Barbarous Mexico* (Irving G. Ries, 1913), and *Cross the Mexican Line* (Wallace Reid, 1914) focus on the revolution.

celebration of unionism, but both films make use of strikingly similar evocations of revolutionary Mexico and Mexicans.

Revolution is one of the central themes in films about the US-Mexico border produced during the Cold War, and this part of the thesis investigates what this focus on revolution might reveal about cold war culture and about the relationship between genre and cold war cinema. The two films examined in this chapter and the next, *Vera Cruz* and *Border River*, are both generally classified as westerns in reviews, marketing and criticism today, however neither film was categorised solely as a western in its contemporary critical reception. Considering these two films outside of the western canon, this part of the thesis asks what more can be learned when these movies are instead approached as border films. This chapter and the next will use western genre criticism in order to question existing accounts of the genre in this period and its relationship with political issues.

Much critical work that focuses on westerns and their historical contexts draws on Richard Slotkin's study of frontier mythology in American culture.²³⁷ For example, writing specifically on individualism, one of the central concerns of this chapter, Michael Coyne asserts that westerns form 'a paean to individualism, a consummate fantasy of freedom of movement and limitless horizons, lacking most social constraints,' directly connecting individualism to frontier mythology.²³⁸ As Peter Stanfield has argued, among many critics writing about westerns of the cold war era, 'there is a consensus that westerns do "speak" to contemporary concerns, and that this is best translated through the myth of the frontier.'²³⁹ While Slotkin's study of frontier mythology is hugely important, it also reduces the many complexities and contradictions within the western genre to a singular mythology. Stanfield argues that while Slotkin's formula may serve to explain post-Second World War westerns, it cannot account for the diversity of western filmmaking in the 1930s.²⁴⁰ However, this chapter and the next will argue that when taken in their specific historical and production contexts, the myth of the frontier is an equally inadequate account of the way in which these 1950s films respond to their cultural contexts. By positioning *Vera Cruz* and *Border River* outside of traditional definitions of the western canon and

²³⁷ See note 41 to the introduction to this thesis for a selection of studies of the western genre which focus on frontier mythology.

²³⁸ Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 11.

²³⁹ Stanfield, *Westerns*, 8.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

examining them instead in relation to the US-Mexico border, these two chapters will argue that the films articulate a response to their contemporary cultural, historical and political environments through debates around colonialism, rather than frontier mythology. This discussion will also raise wider issues around the connections between cold war politics and film genre.

Critics have often viewed the presence of Mexico in western films either as an extraneous exotic backdrop or a space used to illustrate the expansion of the United States' influence. While Christopher Frayling finds that many Mexican settings 'simply provided colourful exteriors, cheap extras and a fashionably "Third World" atmosphere,' Camilla Fojas contends that films about the border and Mexico are 'concerned with fortifying U.S. national identity during times of cultural transition.'²⁴¹ Carlos Cortés further claims that Hollywood's Mexico reaffirms the US nation and lays the ground for US expansion.²⁴² Where *Vera Cruz* has already received critical attention, the film has often been considered simply in terms of its place within the western canon and Robert Aldrich's oeuvre. However, Fojas has probed more deeply and has considered the role of border crossing in *Vera Cruz*, arguing that the movie is concerned with issues of 'reunification' following the US Civil War.²⁴³ She claims that 'the Mexican context' is 'neutral ground upon which soldiers from different sides of the civil war might join together against the American enemy, the French empire.'²⁴⁴ However, rather than serving simply as an apolitical backdrop or blank screen upon which new American identity is negotiated, this chapter will argue that the Mexican setting is vital in *Vera Cruz* for the film's narrative, tone and politics.

The first section of the chapter examines the representation of Mexico in *Vera Cruz* through close textual analysis of the cinematic space and landscape. It contends that revolutionary Mexico is celebrated through its depiction as a mythic historical site. Rather than conforming to accounts of the western genre which understand cold war films to ascribe to frontier mythology, *Vera Cruz*'s mythology emanates from Mexico. This section of the chapter therefore asserts that *Vera Cruz* challenges many conventional definitions of the western genre in this period and must be analysed outside of this generic framework. The second part of the chapter examines the representation of individualism and collectivity in the film through the American lead

²⁴¹ Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns*, 222; Fojas, *Border Bandits*, 16.

²⁴² Cortés, 'Neighbor,' 95.

²⁴³ Fojas, *Border Bandits*, 69.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

characters and the Mexican revolutionaries. Individualism is closely connected to capitalism in the film, as questions of economics and value permeate the narrative and become revolutionary concerns. In the film the collectivity of the Juaristas and their fight to overthrow the French empire is celebrated, but their story nevertheless only serves as a backdrop to the individualised American heroes. The final section of the chapter moves on to explore the film's production context, suggesting that for *Vera Cruz*, the act of crossing over into Mexico is specifically linked to the filmmakers' political interests. As with several of the other films examined in the thesis, the involvement of key left-wing figures like Aldrich and Burt Lancaster in border crossing films is impossible to ignore, particularly at a time when Hollywood was under considerable political pressure from HUAC investigations into left-wing activities. The chapter therefore argues that the territorial disputes of revolutionary Mexico are used in *Vera Cruz* to articulate political concerns about the US' contemporary relationship with Mexico. In line with the thesis' central argument, through revolution, and through its depiction of individualism in particular, *Vera Cruz* foregrounds debates about colonialism which were central to the cold war political climate.

Mexican mythologies

Against its revolutionary Mexican backdrop, *Vera Cruz* tells the story of two American soldiers who travel to Mexico to offer their services to the highest bidder in the late nineteenth-century fight between French Emperor Maximilian and the Mexican peasant followers of revolutionary leader Benito Juárez, known as Juaristas. The film opens showing lone figures on horseback travelling across country as titles explain that many American soldiers travelled to Mexico during the revolution. This opening border-crossing montage sets up the transformational personal journeys which the American heroes will undergo. Ben Trane (Gary Cooper), accompanied by Joe Erin (Lancaster) and a band of US mercenaries, is employed to escort a French countess (Denise Darcel) and a substantial quantity of plundered gold from Mexico City to the port of Veracruz for sailing back to France. On the way, Trane is won over by the revolutionary workers' cause whereas Erin becomes obsessed with individual financial gain and is killed by Trane as he attempts to steal the bullion for himself. At the end of the film, Trane helps secure the gold for the Juaristas and joins their fight to free Mexico from its French oppressors.

In recent criticism, *Vera Cruz* is generally classified as a western.²⁴⁵ To apply Rick Altman's influential generic formula, the film uses both semantic and syntactic elements of this genre; semantically, it features the costuming, expansive landscapes, horses and guns common to many westerns, and like many films of the genre it seems to be concerned with the broad structural or syntactic axes of good and bad, nature and culture, and outsiders and insiders.²⁴⁶ *Vera Cruz* was often classified as a western upon its release, with *The Hollywood Reporter* proclaiming it a 'slam-bang super-western,' and the *New York Times* admonishing its 'standard horse opera clichés.'²⁴⁷ However, contemporary reviews also described the film as 'a fine swashbuckling adventure story,' and an 'adventure melodrama,' with 'rough and rugged outdoor action,' suggesting that the outdoor adventure and drama was at least as important to contemporary audiences as the film's western elements.²⁴⁸

As described in the introduction to this chapter, westerns produced during the Cold War have often been seen to reflect an expansive frontier mythology. However, *Vera Cruz* is not concerned with the American frontier but rather with a specifically Mexican mythology, developed through the cinematic focus on Mexican heritage and landscape. Indeed, it was above all the film's location that was identified as the key to *Vera Cruz*'s success by its contemporary critics. *The Monthly Film Bulletin* credited 'the variety of scene' with giving 'vitality and interest. The action, relentless and vivid, is constantly placed in perspective by superb panoramas of the countryside.'²⁴⁹ Likewise, Jack Moffitt, for *The Hollywood Reporter* found the fact that it was shot in Mexico on 'colorful and authentic locales' made the film 'good news for the exhibitor.'²⁵⁰ Even the *New York Times*' Bosley Crowther in his vehemently unfavourable review singled out the 'wide open country of Mexico' as a potential saving grace.²⁵¹ In addition, the location's importance is also stressed by the notice in the film's end credits and theatrical trailer which states that the picture was 'filmed

²⁴⁵ See for example, Geoffrey McNab, Rev. of *Vera Cruz*, *Sight and Sound* 11 (8) (2001): 61; Henryk Hoffmann, *Western Movie References in American Literature* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012), 95; David Thomson, *A Biographical Dictionary of Film* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1994), 145.

²⁴⁶ Rick Altman, 'A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,' *Cinema Journal* 23 (3) (1984): 6-18.

²⁴⁷ Jack Moffitt, 'Hecht-Lancaster, Hill and Aldrich Turn Out a Natural,' Rev. of *Vera Cruz*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 22 December 1954, 3; Bosley Crowther, Rev. of *Vera Cruz*, *New York Times*, 27 December 1954, 22.

²⁴⁸ Rev. of *Vera Cruz*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 22 (255) (1955): 55; Rev. of *Vera Cruz*, *Today's Cinema*, 9 February 1955, 9; Rev. of *Vera Cruz*, *Variety*, 22 December 1954, 6.

²⁴⁹ Rev. of *Vera Cruz*, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 55.

²⁵⁰ Moffitt, 'Hecht-Lancaster, Hill and Aldrich,' 3.

²⁵¹ Crowther, Rev. of *Vera Cruz*, 22.

entirely in Mexico.’ Despite its opening border-crossing scenes, *Vera Cruz* was, according to Fojas, one of the very first Hollywood features to be filmed wholly in Mexico.²⁵² This indicates that the Mexican setting was seen as crucially important at the time to both the filmmakers and audiences.

It is no wonder that so much was made of the film’s setting in reviews, as *Vera Cruz* presents an epic romanticised Mexican landscape through which the country’s cultural heritage is celebrated. Each of the small towns which the travelling party of Americans enters is full of beautiful but dilapidated buildings and architecture. A scene in one of the first Mexican settlements featured in the film opens with two small boys in traditional dress walking down a street lined with ruinous archways, apparently the remains of buildings, or the beginnings of ones that were never completed. Yet, rather than appearing backwards or undeveloped, these empty archways standing alone appear like sculptures or ancient monuments as the camera slowly glides through them. The decaying plaster and paintwork does not look dirty or scruffy, but becomes a beautiful palette of colour set off against the blue sky and brown track.

The image of the archway is repeated frequently throughout the film, and most prominently in a scene showing a convoy of Maximilian’s forces and the group of Americans travelling to Veracruz. The caravan passes an old aqueduct, and its archways form the background to the action. The white, sun-bleached structure with its cracked plaster is dotted with plants, and the trees situated behind make it appear a part of nature. The arch is a traditional feature of Mexican architecture, but here, as in the town shown earlier, the camera’s continual focus on the arches paints them with grandeur like a series of standing stones. This careful attention to ruinous architecture presents the Mexican landscape as an ancient relic to be revered and idolised. The mythic and monumental way in which the decaying structures are filmed recalls the epic landscapes of westerns set in the old American west. Rather than alluding to the mythology of the frontier, *Vera Cruz* evokes a specifically Mexican mythology, but one that also historically fixes the country in an ancient past.

Writing of western landscapes and mythology, Jane Tompkins has argued that the use of monumental backdrops is an act of myth-making itself:

In the beginning, say these shots, was the earth, and the earth was desert. It was here first, before anything. And the story you are about to see

²⁵² Fojas, *Border Bandits*, 68.

goes back to the beginning of things, starts, literally, from the ground up. In the instant before the human figure appears we have the sense of being present at a moment before time began. All there is is space, pure and absolute.²⁵³

Thus for Tompkins, the western landscape speaks of stories which stretch back to the very dawn of time, of eternal truths and universal narratives. She also notes the distinct 'architectural quality' of the 'monumental' spaces of westerns, such as Monument Valley.²⁵⁴ For Tompkins' argument, the space and setting of the western confers on its story the quality of myths and legends, appealing to the ancient landscapes in which the action takes place. The monumental quality of *Vera Cruz*'s architectural spaces means that they are equally implicated in myth-making, in this case within a Mexican setting. Through the carefully depicted images of ruinous Mexican architecture, the film creates a Mexican mythology which evokes an ancient lineage and epic beauty. This effect is further enhanced by the presence of real Mexican ruins in the film.

The complex of ancient ruins which the party passes through on their journey appears to have been filmed at Teotihuacán, an archaeological site near Mexico City.²⁵⁵ Teotihuacán is the name given to the ruins of an enormous Mesoamerican city which was established in the first or second century BC. At its height, the city may have held up to 100,000 inhabitants, and also appears to have had widespread influence across the region.²⁵⁶ When the ruins are shown in the film, they appear as if from nowhere. One moment characters are shown in discussion in close-up, and then immediately a long shot of a pyramid appears, filling the sky and the screen. The soundtrack also underlines the ruins' imposing majesty as discordant rhythmic chiming evokes the mystery and power of this ancient city. The film's SuperScope format enables an extreme wide shot of the convoy passing one of the long sides of the pyramid, making clear their diminutive size compared to this awesome structure.

Following from the pyramid, the characters move slowly along what appears to be the Avenue of the Dead, the main street of Teotihuacán which runs for about two and a half kilometres and is lined with low-level pyramids and tiered walls. The presence of

²⁵³ Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 70.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁵⁵ Much of the filming was indeed undertaken in Mexico City and the nearby Cuernavaca valley according to an article in the *New York Times* which would seem to corroborate this. See Flora Lewis, 'Cameras Capture "Vera Cruz" in Cuernavaca,' *New York Times*, 11 April 1954, X5.

²⁵⁶ George L. Cowgill, 'State and Society at Teotihuacan, Mexico,' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 130-135.

these structures in the background again speaks of a mythic Mexico which is mysterious, powerful and awe-inspiring to the Americans who travel through it. This mythic and monumental backdrop serves to link Mexico and Mexicans to an ancient heritage, and celebrates the ancient cultures and history of the country. In so doing, the movie seems to question the legitimacy of the United States' territorial claims on the continent. Repeatedly the history of the US-Mexico border has seen land taken away from Mexico, for example, when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was drawn up after the war between the two countries in 1848, Mexico was forced to sell almost one-third of its territory to the United States, as discussed in chapter two.²⁵⁷ Through its emphasis on Mexico's ancient relationship to the land, *Vera Cruz* questions America's colonisation of areas such as Arizona, New Mexico and Texas through evoking the ancient Mexican cultures which previously existed there.

Individualism and collectivism

Critics have often identified individualism as a key component of the western genre, drawing on popular ideas about the role of the frontier in American culture dating back to Frederick Jackson Turner.²⁵⁸ Those writing in the cold war period were no exception, and many contended that individualism was one of the key themes and ideologies of the American west, and was always inextricably linked to the frontier. In 1950 Frederick Elkin contended that 'rugged individualism' was one of the central values of the western genre, and in the same year, Henry Nash Smith similarly observed heroes of the west to be 'symbols of anarchic freedom', 'men who ranged the wilderness [and] had fled the restraints of civilization.'²⁵⁹ These critics saw the individualist pursuit of territory as a core component of American identity, and linked it directly to the stories of rugged men who tamed the wilderness of the western frontier.

More recently, Stanley Corkin has contended that cold war westerns reflect the 'inevitability of U.S. expansion' at this time and 'express the legitimacy and necessity

²⁵⁷ Lorey, *U.S.-Mexican Border*, 29.

²⁵⁸ See for example, Coyne, *Crowded Prairie*; O'Connor and Rollins, eds, *Hollywood's West*; John H. Lenihan, *Showdown: Confronting Modern America in the Western Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Will Wright, *The Wild West: The Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 2001).

²⁵⁹ Frederick Elkin, 'The Psychological Appeal of the Hollywood Western,' *Journal of Educational Sociology* 24 (2) (1950): 74; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, 20th anniversary ed. (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1970), 81.

of the American empire.²⁶⁰ For Corkin, westerns produced in this period such as *Red River* (Howard Hawks, 1946) and *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1948) laid the ground for American expansion through their narratives which are focused on capitalism and economic concerns. Corkin claims that the repeated emphasis on trade and free markets in cold war westerns seeks to legitimise individualist capitalism, assertions which close examination of *Vera Cruz*'s vision of individualism and capitalism will challenge. Like the movies Corkin cites, *Vera Cruz* is also concerned with money. However, rather than being related to expansionist frontier mythology, the film's economic narrative and extant conflicts between personal gain and societal benefit are used to question individualism in relation to the communitarian goals of revolution.

The main action of *Vera Cruz* centres around a shipment of gold that must be taken to the port at Veracruz for sailing back to France. All of the characters want to get their hands on the bullion, forming the basis for interlocking narratives of double-crossing and cheating. The initial motivation for Trane and Erin to join forces and offer themselves as fighters is to make money by auctioning and awarding their services to the highest bidder. However, when the Mexican revolutionary leader General Ramírez attempts to entice the Americans to join him, more complex issues of monetary and moral values are raised as he declares: 'We offer more than money: we offer a cause.' When Trane and Erin join forces with the Juaristas to take back the gold from the French, again it is for a price, but by this point in the film, Trane has begun to develop a very different sense of value from Erin. As the synopsis in the film's publicity material explains:

each from a different motive, they agree to join the Juaristas in storming the garrison: Trane has been convinced by Nina that the gold honestly belongs to the people of Mexico, and moved by the words of Aguilar [Ramírez²⁶¹] that a man must have a cause to give him a reason for living; but Erin seeks the gold purely for profit.²⁶²

The individualist Americans must choose whether to put aside their capitalist ambitions to join with the Juaristas and fight for a cause, or to pursue the stolen money individually. Attempting to steal the gold for himself leads to Erin's downfall, and

²⁶⁰ Corkin, *Cowboys*, 20; Corkin, 'Free Markets,' 79.

²⁶¹ Morris Ankrum's character is referred to as General Aguilar throughout the press pack, rather than General Ramírez as in the film itself, indicating the name was changed during filming, perhaps to a more recognisably 'Mexican' name for US audiences.

²⁶² *Vera Cruz* press pack, British Film Institute National Archive, 1954, 1.

Trane, the only American figure left standing by the end of the film, chooses the revolutionary cause, deciding that the gold rightly belongs to the Juaristas. Contrary to Corkin's claims, *Vera Cruz* does not legitimise US expansion through the mythology of the frontier, but rather opens up debate on the connections between individualism, capitalism and colonialism.

Although it was produced during a period of high capitalism in the United States, *Vera Cruz* does not simply lay the ground for American expansion or endorse individual financial gain. Considering the huge rise of mass-produced goods and consumer spending in the post-Second World War United States, the film's narrative can be said to adopt a highly ambivalent position on the capitalist mores of the time. Writing in 1958, the economist John Galbraith explains the scale of the change in consumer practices during this period:

In the five years from the end of 1952 to the end of 1956 total consumer debt (not including real estate loans) increased from \$27.4 billions to \$41.7 billions or by 53 per cent. Installment credit increased by 63 per cent and that for automobiles by nearly a hundred per cent.²⁶³

The huge increase in spending and the concomitant need for ever more money meant that this new consumer-led society reinforced the capitalist ethos of the time. Demonstrating the pervasiveness of frontier mythology and its relationship to capitalism, Galbraith claims that this consumer society was a direct result of a unique brand of 'American economic ideas' that were influenced by the 'expansive mood' of 'the frontier and the West'.²⁶⁴ However, for *Vera Cruz*, questions of capitalism are brought into conversation with ideas of revolution, and individualism is interrogated in the film. While the American stars are inevitably individualised and celebrated through individualistic performances, the collective cause of the Mexican revolutionaries is lauded over and above personal financial gain.

Vera Cruz's narrative is closely concerned with communitarian and collective ways of life through its focus on the Juarista revolutionaries. The Juaristas' point of view is often privileged within the story, and this is enacted literally through cinematic space and perspective. The American soldiers and French countess pass through the complex of ancient ruins mid-way through the film. While the characters move past a high temple, a shot suddenly changes the camera angle and looks down at a vertiginous

²⁶³ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1958), 201.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 48; 63.

angle from high up the pyramid. A Juarista is then shown keeping watch atop the structure, before the camera pans back down, giving a high angle view of the party below. Long shots filmed from high, hidden, places open almost every new location in the film. For example, as the French carriage and escort approaches a monastery, a shot from within the bell tower looks down on them as they enter the square. Likewise, near the start of the film as Trane and Erin begin their journey together, the camera is placed high on what appears to be the top of a cliff or mountain. The Americans are seen far below, as the camera peers out from behind a rock, apparently overhanging the desert below.

These images seem at first to be simple establishing shots which are unmotivated by characters within the filmic diegesis. However, the explicit linking of the Juarista's position looking down with the shot from the pyramid reveals that these extreme high-angle shots are in fact the Juaristas' points of view and the revolutionaries later reveal that they have been following the movements of the Americans throughout the film. In this way, the Juaristas occupy the traditional position of a bandit in the film, hiding and watching from high places. But in *Vera Cruz*, viewers share their position through these look-out shots. As Noël Carroll has argued, the use of point of view shots encourages the audience to empathise with these characters as we see the action through their eyes.²⁶⁵ Through this device the film creates direct empathy with the Juaristas and their cause.

A scene set in the Juarista camp the night before the film's final battle also makes *Vera Cruz*'s alignment with the revolutionaries explicit. Filmed on the most modest set of the film, the guitar music is subtle, the light is low, and the mood is one of reverence as General Ramírez (Morris Ankrum) delivers a stirring speech. The quiet tone of this moment is strikingly different to the rest of the film. This understated scene is devoid of the flamboyance and tension which characterise the performances of Lancaster and Cooper in other parts of the picture, and emphasises the simple truth of the General's words. Ramírez calmly says to Trane, 'money. Is that worth risking your life for? A man needs more, something to believe in.' The quiet force of the General's speech coupled with images of the soldiers communing and sharing demonstrates the film's celebration of this revolutionary and communal way of life. The change in tone brought about by the stillness, the low lighting and the General's underplayed dialogue

²⁶⁵ Noël Carroll, 'Toward a Theory of Point-of-View Editing: Communication, Emotion, and the Movies,' *Poetics Today* 14 (1) (1993): 126. Carroll further argues that this type of shot is deployed for the 'communication of emotion' and works to align audiences with characters in film.

marks this scene out as a moment of truth amidst the chaotic and changing narrative of the film. *Vera Cruz* clearly venerates this simple, yet passionate and political way of life which privileges communal actions for the good of society over individualist actions for personal gain. Although Fojas asserts that the film is concerned with bringing together confederates and unionists in the face of the French imperialists, it is only Trane who joins the revolution to help oust the colonial rulers, in direct opposition to the other American characters.²⁶⁶ The confederate Trane's choice to join the Mexican communitarian cause speaks more to an anti-colonialist position than a unificationist agenda, and the fact that in this act he is directly opposed to the other American characters who seek personal gain is strongly indicative of the film's lack of concern with uniting the United States.

For Philip French, the distinctive visual representation of the Juaristas in *Vera Cruz* demonstrates the influence of Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco and their 'stylised groupings of peasants and revolutionaries' on the film.²⁶⁷ For example, Rivera's *Peasants* (1947) and Orozco's *Zapatistas* (1931) show peasants and revolutionaries in white dress, with wide-brimmed hats, their outlines arresting against the backgrounds of the paintings, images which find echoes in *Vera Cruz*'s Juaristas. The influence of Rivera and Orozco, both explicitly political artists committed to socialism and communism, is significant. Rivera was a particularly potent figure of radicalism and revolution, identifying himself as 'a loyal revolutionary in the Bolshevik-Leninist tradition.'²⁶⁸ As Jeffrey Belnap explains, although he was criticised by other Mexican artists for taking on commissions from enterprises supported by American capitalists such as Rockefeller and Ford, Rivera argued that these opportunities enabled him to operate 'as a guerrilla fighter who worked for the cause of world revolution behind enemy lines.'²⁶⁹ That *Vera Cruz*'s Juaristas might be influenced by these murals depicting the struggles of Mexican revolutionaries, as well as Rivera's revolutionary politics, emphasises the film's empathy with this cause and makes the figure of the Mexican peasant a politically potent image.

²⁶⁶ Fojas, *Border Bandits*, 69.

²⁶⁷ Philip French, *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre and Westerns Revisited* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 2005), 69.

²⁶⁸ Jeffrey Belnap, 'Diego Rivera's Greater America Pan-American Patronage, Indigenism, and H.P.,' *Cultural Critique* 63 (2006): 62.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 65. Most famously, Rivera refused to remove an image of Lenin from his Rockefeller Institute project which resulted in the complete destruction of the mural.

The Mexican characters are also closely connected with Mexican terrain in the movie. The large group of Juarista soldiers are most frequently seen silently appearing from nowhere on command, lining the horizon in a ring of hats, white suits, and rifles. They are first shown as Trane, Erin and their band of American mercenaries meet with the Mexican and French forces in a small town square. Once inside the walls of the square, General Ramírez announces that the band of Americans has been taken prisoner. As Erin grins in disbelief, Ramírez nods indicating the walls of the square all around them. The camera begins a slow circular pan around the square's high walls as hundreds of men armed with rifles appear in turn to silently surround the group. Trane and Erin are shown in close-up shots from below, as the Juarista soldiers fill the screen behind them, emphasising their total control over the situation, but also forming a beautiful and striking outline against the blue sky. Appearing from nowhere, it is as if the Mexicans spring forth from the architecture or the landscape itself.

Concurrent with *Vera Cruz*'s celebration of Mexico through its mythic landscapes and representation of the Juaristas as a noble people, the film also has an obvious concern with preserving an authentic, ancient Mexico. As Edward Said argued of Orientalism, *Vera Cruz* makes Mexico speak, describes it and 'renders its mysteries plain' for US audiences.²⁷⁰ The film inherently participates in 'dominating, restructuring and having authority' over Mexico and it cannot escape these discourses, as demonstrated through its focus on the plight of the American characters.²⁷¹ Although the Juaristas are presented as moral, stoic soldiers, they are unindividualised and treated as a uniform collective unlike the American stars who are distinct individuals. Because they are always shown as a collective, the Juaristas are on the very periphery of the narrative and even the shot composition. They line the edges of the screen, literally serving as a background for the American hero and antagonist. While they appear stoic and noble rather than menacing or threatening through these stylised representations, they do not ultimately challenge the positions of Cooper and Lancaster as the stars of the movie. Although it clearly endorses the Juaristas' collective socialist ethos, *Vera Cruz* also celebrates its individualised American star characters, both the good and the bad.

Left-wing politics and revolutionary Mexico

²⁷⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

I will now briefly examine *Vera Cruz*'s production contexts to contend that the political environment in which it was made may have had significant effects on its representations of individualism, communitarianism and capitalism. *Vera Cruz* was produced by Lancaster and Harold Hecht's company Hecht-Lancaster and released through the independent studio United Artists. It was the second western in a row for the studio which brought Lancaster and Aldrich together, following *Apache* which was made the same year.²⁷² The movie had a budget of \$3 million and was 'filmed at the relatively leisurely pace of two and a half months.'²⁷³ It was Aldrich's first major film as director and by dint of his growing power and status in the industry it was a relatively grand affair. Aldrich took 100 cast and crew members with him to Mexico, and according to the fairly extensive press coverage the production received, he hired a further 200 locals on arrival.²⁷⁴ Filmed at considerable expense in both Technicolor and SuperScope, *Vera Cruz* was under pressure to perform at the box office, and the company pulled out all the stops in the press pack by advising exhibitors to hire actors to dress as characters from the film and parade through the streets near their cinemas. The movie went on to be Hecht-Lancaster's biggest film thus far, with initial release earnings of more than \$9 million.²⁷⁵ The film's commercial success was thus very important for its producers. However, the involvement of several key left-wing Hollywood personnel also seems significant and suggestive of a connection between *Vera Cruz*'s vision of revolutionary Mexico and left-wing politics.

Vera Cruz's director, Aldrich, is famed for the left-wing political nature of his films, which have been described as 'iconoclastic, anti-authoritarian, even revolutionary in message.'²⁷⁶ As the first major film he directed with a substantial budget, coupled with the fact that United Artists was founded upon the premise of granting of autonomy and creative freedom to filmmakers, it is likely that *Vera Cruz* offered Aldrich the opportunity to explore his personal and political interests.²⁷⁷ Aldrich came from a wealthy and powerful family but struck out against their conservative politics through his outspoken socialist ideology. For example, as national vice-president and subsequently president of the Director's Guild, Aldrich made the position an explicitly

²⁷² Gary Fishgall, *Against Type: The Biography of Burt Lancaster* (New York and London: Scribner, 1995), 123.

²⁷³ Edwin T. Arnold and Eugene L. Miller, *The Films and Career of Robert Aldrich* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 31.

²⁷⁴ Lewis, 'Cameras Capture,' X5.

²⁷⁵ Fishgall, *Against Type*, 135.

²⁷⁶ Arnold and Miller, *Films and Career*, 2.

²⁷⁷ Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company that Changed the Film Industry* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 3.

political one, and, in his own words, he ‘thought of the guild as a political instrument for the betterment of its members’ in sharp contrast to his predecessors in the role.²⁷⁸ Aldrich spent the formative years of his career at the left-wing independent Enterprise studios, working alongside political figures such as Abraham Polonsky, Robert Rossen, John Berry, and John Garfield, forming a close-knit community of liberal and leftist filmmakers. These four were among those blacklisted for suspected links to communism by HUAC at the time of *Vera Cruz*’s production.²⁷⁹ In addition, both the film’s presenter, Hecht, and one of the scriptwriters, Roland Kibbee, were summoned by the Committee in 1953 under suspicion of links to left-wing and communist factions.

Lancaster too was a prominent left-wing figure in Hollywood at the time of the film’s production. Gary Fishgall argues that Lancaster’s ‘long public commitment to liberal causes’ began in the early 1950s with his involvement in the Hollywood movement against the HUAC investigations, the Committee for the First Amendment.²⁸⁰ Although not called before HUAC, Lancaster was considered a potential subversive and had his passport confiscated. He later attested that as a result of his political stance ‘[i]n a very small way, certainly not comparable to what others had suffered, I was on blacklists.’²⁸¹ Lancaster would return again to revolutionary Mexico in *The Professionals*, but this time to be won around to the revolutionaries’ cause.

Because of the left-wing politics of key members of the cast and crew, the production of *Vera Cruz* was directly affected by HUAC investigations into communism in Hollywood. Tony Williams has argued that ‘[a]lthough far removed from the 1950s by its historical setting, *Vera Cruz* foreshadows that later blacklisting era, which saw many examples of personal and political betrayals.’²⁸² Indeed, *Vera Cruz* can be read as an indictment of the HUAC blacklisting through its political figuring of Mexico and Mexicans. The team working at the heart of the production included prominent left and liberal figures who were concerned about HUAC’s intervention in Hollywood. Their colleagues were blacklisted and the film’s writer and presenter were called before the Committee itself. As an independent and personal

²⁷⁸ Quoted in Edwin T. Arnold and Eugene L. Miller, eds, *Robert Aldrich: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), xii.

²⁷⁹ Arnold and Miller, *Films and Career*, 1.

²⁸⁰ Fishgall, *Against Type*, 68.

²⁸¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁸² Tony Williams, *Body and Soul: The Cinematic Vision of Robert Aldrich* (Lanham and Oxford: Scarecrow Press Inc, 2004), 174.

project for Hecht, Lancaster and Aldrich, the film can be seen to reflect the filmmakers' experiences with the oppressive presence of HUAC in Hollywood at the time. However, *Vera Cruz*'s leftist vision of revolutionary Mexico is ambivalent and conflicted. Rather than simply reflecting HUAC oppression, it also evokes a sense of the unstable and heterogeneous status of left-wing politics in the Cold War. Although, as I have argued, the terms of cold war debate represent an end of clear political division insofar as the language of colonialism was used across the political spectrum, *Vera Cruz*'s conflicted vision nevertheless indicates the way in which cinematic border crossing enabled a variety of different ideological positions to flourish.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that although it is often classified as a western, *Vera Cruz* does not exhibit the frontier mythology that Slotkin argues pervades cultural representations of the American west, but rather establishes a specifically Mexican mythology. Through its celebration of Mexican landscape and heritage, the film questions French and American colonial claims on the continent. Further, *Vera Cruz* interrogates ideas of individualism and collectivism in relation to Mexican revolutionary movements and the overthrow of colonial leaders. Individualist capitalism is set against the Juaristas' moral communitarian cause, and the film presents a debate around individualism which is articulated through the complexities of revolution rather than a simple expansive frontier mythology. Revolution is a central theme of many American films which cross the border into Mexico in the Cold War, and like several of the other films examined in this thesis, key left-wing Hollywood figures make up *Vera Cruz*'s production crew. Perhaps echoing the flood of left-wing writers, artists and intellectuals to Mexico City to escape persecution by anti-communist factions at this time, *Vera Cruz*'s Mexican landscapes create a 'space of critique' where debates around revolution and radicalism can take place.²⁸³ It is through Mexican revolution and the overthrow of the French empire that *Vera Cruz* engages with contemporary debates around colonialism in the Cold War.

This chapter has considered *Vera Cruz* outside of the context of the western genre, and shown that elements of western genre criticism are too restrictive when bound by Slotkin's frontier mythology. By analysing the film through its representation

²⁸³ Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles*, xii.

of the US-Mexico border rather than as a genre piece, this chapter contends that cultural engagement with cold war concerns is not limited to any particular genre or by generic frameworks. The next chapter similarly takes a western as its case study. Analysing *Border River*, also released in 1954, it argues that considering the film in terms of its representation of the border rather than as an example of a western can further develop our understanding of the ways in which cold war politics relate to cinema.

Territory, Colonialism and Gender: *Border River* (1954) and the American Frontier

Westerns have long been associated with a very specific spatial terrain of vast, open landscapes, and these expansive spaces have been the subject of much critical attention. André Bazin has argued of westerns that ‘transformation into an epic is evident in the set-up of the shots, with their predilection for vast horizons.’²⁸⁴ For Bazin, as for Jane Tompkins in the previous chapter, it is precisely the images of open landscape which create the mythic properties of westerns. Scott Simmon claims that it was through the genre’s shift from its early origins in the east to films made in the west that the ‘wide, bright, harsh, “empty” landscape of the west was constructed.’²⁸⁵ Similarly, in his analysis of masculinity and the genre, Lee Clark Mitchell asserts that the western hero is ‘ineluctably a part’ of the wide open spaces and landscape which characterise the films.²⁸⁶

The landscapes of the western were also a key concern for critics writing in the 1950s. Henry Nash Smith argued that ‘the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent drawing population westward’ had a central influence on American literature and society.²⁸⁷ Clearly drawing on Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, Smith’s analysis of the west and westerns is developed through space and specifically through the expansion of US national territory at the frontier. Much more recently, Stanley Corkin has claimed that it is through their landscapes that westerns convey the ‘inevitability of US expansion’ in the years following the Second World War.²⁸⁸ However, through close analysis of the film *Border River*, this chapter will argue that this film’s terrain is not wide or open, and it does not express any ‘inevitability’ of American expansion. Nor does *Border River* fit easily within the

²⁸⁴ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. 2, trans. Hugh Gray (1971; repr., Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2005), 147.

²⁸⁵ Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre’s First Half-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45.

²⁸⁶ Lee Clark Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.

²⁸⁷ Smith, *Virgin Land*, 3.

²⁸⁸ Corkin, *Cowboys*, 20.

mythology of the frontier that scholars from Smith to Bazin, Simmon and Corkin find at the heart of the western genre. This chapter argues that, as was the case with *Vera Cruz*, *Border River* engages with colonialism as a central concern, articulated here through revolutionary territorial dispute.

The cold war period saw a significant renegotiation of the United States' place in the world as it sought to establish itself as global leader. Historian Thomas J. McCormick has argued that during the 1950s US leaders believed 'the rest of the world would win more than it would lose by acquiescing in American hegemony.'²⁸⁹ This unquestioning assumption of the United States' position as leader of the western world promoted an exceptionalist and expansionist view of the nation among its leaders which assumed that the United States was the exception to the rule; it led the world and expected it to follow. As I described in the previous chapter, the country underwent massive economic expansion during the Cold War and this was naturalised by economists like John Galbraith as the continuation of a distinctly and intrinsically American expansive impulse. Holding clear echoes of Smith's work, the 'expansive mood' of the economy that Galbraith described was linked directly to the frontier.²⁹⁰

American economic expansion during the early Cold War was felt particularly keenly in Mexico, in large part through the recruitment of temporary Mexican workers to the south of the country to support the farming industry. The US national press responded with alarmist reports of invading migrants that drew on the threatening language of tides and floods, as discussed in chapter three. However, this commercial connection with Mexico was nothing new; the US had been economically expanding into the country ever since the two nations were established, and with increased intensity following the closure of the western frontier in 1890. One of the reasons that the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution was followed so closely in the US was because of the level of economic and territorial interests in the country. Linda Hall and Don Coerver have argued that '[b]y 1910, foreigners – mostly Americans – owned about one-seventh of the land surface in Mexico.'²⁹¹ Beginning soon after the official closure of the western frontier, the Mexican Revolution posed a threat to this American-owned land; one of the key aims of the revolutionary movements was to reclaim land sold off

²⁸⁹ Thomas J. McCormick, *America's Half-Century: United States Foreign Policy in the Cold War* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 48.

²⁹⁰ Galbraith, *Affluent Society*, 48.

²⁹¹ Linda Hall and Don Coerver, *Revolution on the Border: The United States and Mexico, 1910-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 12.

to foreigners by President Díaz for the Mexican people.²⁹² Thus American economic interests below the border became colonial issues, questions of land ownership, imperialism and revolution.

This chapter will argue that it is these concerns about territory, colonialism and revolution that pervade *Border River*'s narrative. Directed by veteran B-western director George Sherman in 1954 for Universal-International, *Border River* is set in a rogue free zone along the US-Mexico border known as Zona Libre. Although ideas of land and territory are important in the film, it is not centred around or contingent upon expansive vistas and open landscapes. The chapter therefore argues that cold war western genre criticism which is centred on ideas of expansiveness is too restrictive. The first section of this chapter will analyse the geography of *Border River*'s landscape arguing that it presents closed spaces in contrast to the expansive vistas most often associated with the genre. These closed spaces are closely connected to the film's narrative outcome of land reclamation; rather than conveying any celebration of territorial expansion or individualist frontier mythology, the film ends with the redistribution of land and wealth. Through its closed filmic space, the film engages with issues of colonialism and territory rather than frontier mythology, or a cold war culture of 'containment'.²⁹³

The representation of territory is also closely bound up with gender in the film, and the second section of the chapter will explore the connections between its cinematic landscape and gendered colonial mappings. The presence of a strong and politically active Mexican female lead in the film is examined and the chapter argues that, in the same way that the colonised land of Zona Libre is mapped out, the female body is also depicted geographically. This section also investigates the interlinked histories of gender and the frontier, arguing that when taken outside of frontier mythology, *Border River*'s female lead is afforded a degree of independence and self-determination. The final section of the chapter examines *Border River*'s political content, considering the importance of the Civil War and revolutionary Mexican backdrops, as well as the film's production contexts. I argue that this movie espouses no clear political position, and it rather engages with both sides of the debate around colonialism in the Cold War. The chapter concludes by asserting that analysing *Border River* through its cinematic spaces allows a more nuanced reading of cold war politics than generically-framed studies of

²⁹² Britton, *Revolution*, 6.

²⁹³ The way in which Nadel and Elaine May deploy such metaphors of containment within their discussions of 1950s US culture and society is discussed below.

the western during this period offer.

Closed landscapes and revolutionary territory

Border River tells the story of General Mattson (Joel McCrea), a Confederate soldier who crosses the border into Zona Libre, a rogue free zone on the Mexican side of the border to purchase supplies for the war with stolen Union gold.²⁹⁴ He makes a deal with General Calleja (Pedro Armendáriz), the corrupt dictator of the separatist state, who soon learns of the gold and wants it for himself. Meanwhile, Mattson grows closer to Carmelita Carias (Yvonne De Carlo), Calleja's girl, and when Calleja realises he is in danger of losing her he attacks Mattson, attempting to take his gold and withhold supplies. Overpowering him in treacherous quicksand on the banks of the eponymous border river, Mattson leaves Calleja to sink down into oblivion as he rides off with Carias, through the free zone which has been liberated by Juarista revolutionaries.

Border River was almost exclusively categorised as a western by its critics, although it was also described as a 'Technicolor adventure job' and a 'western melodrama.'²⁹⁵ Western genre scholarship is here interrogated to demonstrate that it cannot account for the ways in which *Border River* deals with issues of territory and gender. What critics have identified as the expansive mood of many cold war westerns, particularly those set in Mexico, has often been understood as a simple transference from the westward expansion of the frontier days to ambitions for southwards extension. The French intervention in Mexico (1862-1867) which is dramatised in *Border River* and *Vera Cruz* took place during the final phases of frontier settlement, and beginning in 1910, the Mexican Revolution followed soon after the closing of the frontier. Camilla Fojas has argued that after closure, '[t]he southern line replaced the western frontier as a major organizing symbol of popular culture because it defined the nation on different, more modern terms: the United States was now bounded, limited, and exclusive.'²⁹⁶ However, this chapter argues that at the time of the 1910-1920

²⁹⁴ The premise is based loosely on historical events as the Mexican government did establish free zones along the borderline in the late nineteenth century. Writing in 1892, Mexican Minister to the United States M. Romero tried to assuage US antagonisms about these measures. M. Romero, 'The Free Zone in Mexico,' *The North American Review* 154 (425) (1892): 459-471.

²⁹⁵ Rev. of *Border River*, *Motion Picture Herald Product Digest*, 13 June 1953, 28; Rev. of *Border River*, *Today's Cinema*, 1 February 1954, 14.

²⁹⁶ Fojas, *Border Bandits*, 29.

Revolution, US attitudes toward the southern border were not defined in terms of territorial expansion or frontier spirit, but rather by economic interests as a result of land claims in the country. The revolution specifically targeted American land holdings and business in Mexico. President Díaz, who would be overthrown in the upheaval, had sold off land and resources to foreign businesses, and revolutionaries sought redress through the redistribution of this wealth to the Mexican people. John Britton has argued that the single issue that most concerned the United States government during the revolution was preventing damage to its 'economic connections' in Mexico.²⁹⁷

Much like the opening of *Vera Cruz* and many other westerns of the period, *Border River* begins with long shots of vast, open landscape. A series of explanatory titles clearly situate the action in the period of the French intervention in Mexico and the American Civil War, and on the banks of the Rio Grande. The opening titles play over a long shot of a river, presumably the border river, flowing past monumental sandy coloured rock formations. As the titles fade, the shot continues and the camera remains fixed on this landscape. Then, from behind where the text was located comes a lone rider, scrambling down the rocky cliff towards the river. His entry into the scene having been thus obscured, this character appears to spring straight from the text, situating him directly in the realm of epic narratives and lending a mythic feel to the opening. The rocky cliffs give way to an expanse of scrubland which recedes from the river all the way back into the open sky behind. These American spaces are only seen from across the river, as the camera remains situated on the Mexican bank. As the rider moves more clearly into view from beneath the titles on the screen, he heads towards the river and begins to move across it. The long shot persists, and the camera does not move as the rider and horse slowly make their way through the water. Even as gunshots are heard and pursuers appear on the northern bank, the camera does not shift, allowing only a very limited view of events. Because of the long focal length of the shot, the rider's progress across the river is flattened and stunted; the closer he gets to the Mexican side of the water the slower his progress becomes, and it is as if he is thus immediately entering a more enclosed, restrictive space. As the action finally cuts away from the American rider, it is revealed that this space is controlled by the characters watching on the Mexican bank. General Calleja and his entourage view the events on the river with great interest to see if the rider makes it across the central point, bringing him into Zona Libre.

²⁹⁷ Britton, *Revolution*, 8. The revolution also posed occasional security threats to the US, for example, Pancho Villa's 1916 incursion into Columbus, New Mexico.

This close watching of the border river recalls the fact that people gathered on the American side of the Rio Grande during the Mexican Revolution to watch the fighting.²⁹⁸ Spectators were sometimes injured as stray bullets flew across the river, and Claire Fox argues that this was because people were ‘behaving as though they were watching a play or a movie rather than a war.’²⁹⁹ Upending this historical observation, *Border River* sees Mexicans looking north and gleefully watching on as the American Civil War plays out. With the action now on the Mexican side of the border and in Zona Libre, the dialogue and filmic space focus on questions of land, soil and territory through the film’s continually closed and enclosing spaces.

Following this opening sequence, much of the film’s action takes place in Zona Libre, and in contrast with the broad vistas of the opening shots, Zona Libre is largely comprised of a series of interior sets including the bar room, General Calleja’s office and characters’ apartments. All of these sets are overcrowded with people and objects and give a sense of constraint and oppression. Calleja’s office is filled with opulent patterned rugs and ornaments which stand in the way of the camera as he is framed between pairs of brass candlesticks and gilt mirrors. The bar too is crowded, as the frames of the building, furniture and people all close in on the screen. At one point the camera looks through the spinning wheel of a casino game at characters beyond, the wooden spokes framing the action in the room and enclosing the characters. Within Zona Libre, the camera is always trapped within a network of rooms and partitions, moving from one establishment to another through the tight streets of the township, but never into an open, expansive landscape. In these inside spaces, rooms and objects press in on the edges of the screen claustrophobically.

When the film does venture outside, the land is not open or conquerable, but rather is already and naturally closed. The banks of the river are laced with pools of quicksand which nearly engulf Mattson’s unsuspecting horse at one point. In the final stand-off between Mattson and Calleja, they fall fighting into quicksand, which claims the life of the land-grabbing Calleja while his former girlfriend helps pull Mattson out from the churning earth. Swallowing up the leader who pursued Mexican terrain for individualist ends, it is the landscape that sees Calleja overthrown. Closing in on itself, the pit of quicksand is enclosing and entrapping. The terrain rids itself of those who would seek to control it, presenting a landscape quite unlike the expansive and

²⁹⁸ Fox goes on to explain that, ‘[i]n the 1911 battle of Juárez, for example, four US spectators were killed, and nine were wounded.’ Fox, *Fence and River*, 81.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

conquerable vistas of much western genre criticism.

American cold war culture has previously been described by critics using a similar concept to that of the closedness I describe above, but one which I wish to differentiate the territorial concerns of *Border River* from. Alan Nadel has argued that a culture of ‘containment’ pervaded the United States in the cold war period.³⁰⁰ This idea is derived from US foreign policies during the Cold War which literally sought to contain communism internationally and prevent it from spreading further across the globe. These strategies of containment were implemented by the Truman Administration, and historian John Lewis Gaddis explains that in practice they included employing policies such as limiting the external influence of communist countries.³⁰¹ Nadel and other critics such as Elaine Tyler May see the effects of these strategies of containment borne out on both foreign territory and home turf. For these scholars, narratives of containment sought to contain and control cultural institutions and identities such as the family, sexuality, race and gender.

For example, May argues that the American government saw secure families and homes as a key element in the fight against subversion within the country. Simultaneously, she claims, gender issues played a defining role in cold war rhetoric, and became a vital element of the discourse separating the United States from Russia and elevating it above its rival:

American women, unlike their ‘purposeful and unfeminine Russian counterparts, did not have to be ‘hard working,’ thanks to the wonders of American household appliances. Nor did they busy themselves with the affairs of men, such as politics. Rather, they cultivated their looks and their physical charms, to become sexually attractive housewives and consumers under the American capitalist system.³⁰²

For May, American women and their bodies thus became a battleground in the ideological war against communism. The 1950s did indeed see surprising levels of marriages and births; 96.4 per cent of women and 94.1 per cent of men were married, the highest levels ever recorded, and in addition, ‘most couples had two to four children, born soon after marriage and spaced closer together than in previous years.’³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Nadel, *Containment Culture*.

³⁰¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 41-44.

³⁰² May, *Homeward Bound*, 22.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

Following this argument, we might expect to see such narratives of containment reformulated, replayed or contested in popular culture from this period, and indeed Nadel and May do cite convincing examples of films and literature which support their assertions. However, for *Border River*, a movie borne out of this very same environment, the themes of space and control are rather bound up with colonialism and revolution. The film is concerned with rightful land ownership and explores what happens when territory is colonised, taken over and controlled. Further, for its lead female character the story is more complex than simply one of containment and control. Carias has an active moral sensibility and her political awakening is central to the film's plot, meaning she cannot be contained and enabling her to take an active role in the narrative. As I will argue below, through Carias, the figuring of the film's Mexican landscapes as closed, interior and feminine is complicated.

Rather than reflecting cold war governmental policies of containment, *Border River* taps into the broader debate going on during this period around colonialism. While the US had always stood against old world empires, during the 1950s, it criticised the efforts of the Soviet Union to expand its power across Eastern Europe in colonial terms.³⁰⁴ At the same time, its intense political involvement with other countries, particularly those in Latin America, was becoming more and more akin to a colonial presence. Britton has described this approach as 'informal imperialism, using military intervention, threats of military intervention, diplomatic pressure, and economic clout to influence and at times to manipulate events.'³⁰⁵ Mexico, in particular was the target of these US attentions, not least because of fears that the long, porous border between the countries could allow 'easy access to subversives.'³⁰⁶ Challenging 'containment' accounts of US foreign policy during this period, Greg Grandin argues that US intervention in Latin America was actually more concerned with eliminating concepts of social democracy than containing communism, in order to protect American investments and future oil and labour supply.³⁰⁷ It is the United States' relationship with and intervention in other countries which forms the central concern of *Border River*'s narrative as it explores the consequences of imperial occupation and subsequent revolutionary uprising.

³⁰⁴ See for example, Odd Arne Westad, 'The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 1*, 8-11.

³⁰⁵ Britton, *Revolution*, 8.

³⁰⁶ Calavita, *Inside the State*, 49.

³⁰⁷ Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*, updated ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-18.

Cartographic colonisation, gender and ethnicity

In pre-revolutionary Mexico, American appropriation of Mexican land and resources formed a process of colonising through mapping, where property was established through cartography and the overwriting of the land. However, landscapes are always changing and resisting cartographic fixing, as illustrated by the impossibility of definitively mapping the borderline discussed in chapter two, and much of this American-owned land was returned to Mexico in the revolution. *Border River* is similarly concerned with the failure to map, order and control land. In the film, Calleja's attempts to control the spaces of Zona Libre are visualised explicitly through the character of Carias. As Calleja's love interest, she is constantly subject to gridding and mapping, while the tight spaces of the town literally close in on her as Calleja attempts to tighten his control.

Cartography was a key tool for the colonisers of the Americas, enabling them to map uncivilised territory, pushing back the frontier and incorporating land into the nation. Many critics such as J. Brian Harley, Tom Conley and Karen Piper have argued persuasively of the ideological power of maps and the ways in which they are transformative rather than reflective.³⁰⁸ Harley contends that

Far from holding up a simple mirror of nature that is true or false, maps redescribe the world – like any other document – in terms of relations of power and of cultural practices, preferences, and priorities.³⁰⁹

In the specific case of colonisation, mapping was put to a particular end; the acquisition of land and territory. In his study of colonisation in the Americas, Cole Harris finds that 'maps were tools in the process of land allocation. Property required a location, and maps were the means of establishing it.'³¹⁰ This overwriting of the landscape in perspectival cartography 'conceptualized unfamiliar space in Eurocentric terms,

³⁰⁸ See J. Brian Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, ed. Paul Laxton with an introduction by J. H. Andrews (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001); Tom Conley, *The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Conley, *Cartographic Cinema* and Karen Piper, *Cartographic Fictions: Maps, Race and Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

³⁰⁹ Harley, 'Texts and Contexts in the Interpretation of Early Maps,' in *New Nature of Maps*, 35.

³¹⁰ Harris, 'Colonialism,' 175. See also chapter three for a discussion of the overwriting of landscape and colonialism.

situating it within a culture of vision, measurement, and management.³¹¹ It removed indigenous knowledge, replacing it with an ordered, measured European vision.

Piper argues of the process of colonial mapping that “Territory,”... was something haunted from within by the “primitive,” which had to be perpetually overcome by the sovereign subject.³¹² This always masculine sovereign subject, signifying order, rationality and civilisation, was set in opposition to an explicitly feminised primitive landscape, ‘viewed by the colonizers as infected with fear, superstition, enchantment or fancy.’³¹³ Many early maps were accompanied with allegorical pictures which personified the continents as women. For example, the frontispiece from Joan Blaeu’s *Le Grand Atlas* boasts a striking depiction of Geography and the four continents as women.³¹⁴ Assessing the prolific personification of continents as female virgins, Caterina Albano concludes that ‘cartography selects an image of femininity which can be conquered, subdued and handed over.’³¹⁵ In the US, the notion of the land beyond the frontier as unruly, disordered and irrationally feminine constructed the vision of a land ready to be taken and conquered. For *Border River*, through its closed, interior and overwhelmingly domestic spaces, Mexico is similarly figured as feminine. But through the character of Carias, the conquering of this landscape is contested and challenged, and although Calleja attempts to seize and control the territory and women of Zona Libre, he is not successful in either pursuit.

In *Border River*, Calleja strives to control and order the unruly, primitive land that he has taken occupation of, and likewise attempts to exert control over female bodies in the movie. Although she plays a central role in the narrative, Carias is nevertheless subject to the same effects of Calleja’s colonisation as the very land with which she is identified. For almost all of the film she is only shown inside Zona Libre and within the domestic spaces of her apartment and Calleja’s rooms. She owns a fifty per cent stake in the town’s saloon, revealed by the fact that her portrait hangs behind the bar. As though being enclosed within the filmic frame is not enough, Carias is pressed into the picture’s frame too, a double-binding which maps her in place as an object to be looked at and controlled, set within the ordered gridlines of the colony.

³¹¹ Ibid., 175.

³¹² Piper, *Cartographic Fictions*, 11.

³¹³ Ibid., 10.

³¹⁴ Joan Blaeu, *Le Grand Atlas*, vol. 1, 1667, Library of Congress Atlas Collection. The frontispiece is based on a Peter Paul Rubens painting.

³¹⁵ Caterina Albano, ‘Visible Bodies: Cartography and Anatomy,’ in *Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Andrew Gordon and Bernhard Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 101.

Images of gridding are repeated throughout the film through the presence of divisions and partitions in the spaces of Zona Libre. For instance, within Calleja's apartment and the bar there are areas separated off by vertical bars. In the same way in which she is contained by the painting, Carias is often shown behind these bars. The gridding of the image divides her figure up, mapping her body and attempting to put her under Calleja's control.

However, despite these attempts to contain her in the filmic space and narrative, Carias plays a key role in the movie and towards the end leaves both Zona Libre and Calleja, undergoing a political awakening through a rediscovery of her Mexican heritage. With distinct echoes of the representation of Nina (Sara Montiel) in *Vera Cruz*, it is through her Mexicanness and ostensibly innate sense of political justice and socialism that the film constructs an active and participatory role for Carias. Laura Mulvey has written about the complexity of female roles in westerns. She argues of the film *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946) that the character Pearl demonstrates the way in which many female characters engage with archetypal western gender roles. Rather than a flat, one dimensional character, Pearl embodies both the passive virtuousness and active sexuality identified as opposite character types in earlier criticism.³¹⁶ Through this dual role, Pearl experiences both 'passive sexuality, learning to be "a lady," above all sublimation into a concept of the feminine that is socially viable,' and 'sexual passion [...] a boy/girl mixture of rivalry and play.'³¹⁷ Mulvey's model identifies a western woman in-between, one with active choice and self-determination within the narrative, albeit through her relationships with male characters.

Likewise, Carias' involvement with the two male leads in *Border River* highlights her multiple and complex femininities. With General Calleja she is passive and restricted. The scene in which he presents her with a necklace provides a telling example. A side-on shot shows Calleja ordering Carias to turn around. He reaches for the necklace behind her, and as he places it around her neck the action cuts to a medium close-up of the two characters shown in a mirror. Now seen front-on, Calleja's presence behind her is oppressive and an aggressive hand on her shoulder pins her in place.

³¹⁶ For example, French has argued that there are just 'two kinds of women' in traditional westerns: 'On the one hand there is the unsullied pioneer heroine: virtuous wife, rancher's virginal daughter, schoolteacher, etc.; on the other hand there is the saloon girl with her entourage of dancers.' French, *Westerns*, 38.

³¹⁷ Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946),' in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 35-36.

Carias' entrapment is again emphasised through the framing device of the mirror. The shot appears flattened and cramped as the mirror's frame expands to the edge of the screen. The presence of the vertical bars of the gated section of the room seen within the mirror also serves to emphasise her incarceration.

In contrast, when Carias learns of the Mexicans' plot to ambush Mattson at the river and take the gold, she fools Calleja's henchman Captain Vargas (Alfonso Bedoya) and escapes through the back door of the bar to warn Mattson. She is shown galloping on a horse along a narrow ravine, and rather than sporting her usual luxurious gowns, for this sequence she dons trousers and a buttoned shirt. Carias' active role in the plot is also explicit in her physical rescues of Mattson. In addition to running to his aid at the river at the film's opening, towards the end of the picture she saves his life again by pulling him out of quicksand. It is through Carias' Mexicanness that she is politicised and given this morally and physically active role in the story. The décor of her apartment is centred around portraits of her father and brother who died fighting to free Mexico's terrain from imperialist French occupiers. As for Nina in *Vera Cruz*, Carias' Mexicanness is equated with a romanticised political radicalism. Forming the turning point in her narrative, when Carias is reminded of the sacrifices her family made for their country, she recovers her political ideology. Moved to action as she recalls the pain of losing Mexican territory to the United States in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Carias' political awakening is thus situated in a specifically Mexican experience of land and space, seeking to reclaim what rightly belongs to the people, not expanding or expansive.

Although Carias is overtly Mexicanised through this back story, she is also a particularly Anglicised Mexican character. The character does not resemble any of the most common types of Mexicans seen in American film as identified by Charles Ramirez Berg; she is not easily classifiable as either 'harlot,' 'clown' or 'dark lady.'³¹⁸ She does not speak Spanish, nor does she dress in traditional Mexican clothing, instead mostly wearing dresses befitting a royal courtesan which are very European in flavour. She speaks a well pronounced English and her skin is markedly lighter than that of the other Mexican characters in the film. Carias is played by De Carlo, a Canadian-born actress, whose Hollywood breakthrough came in 1945 when she played an Austrian

³¹⁸ Charles Ramirez Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 66.

seductress in *Salome, Where She Danced* (Charles Lamont, 1945).³¹⁹ Following this success she went on to play characters of varying nationalities, passing as a French dancer in *Song of Scheherazade* (Walter Reisch, 1947), a Persian princess in *The Desert Hawk* (Frederick de Cordova, 1950), a half-Polynesian in *Hurricane Smith* (Jerry Hopper, 1952), and a Mexican maid in *Sombrero* (Norman Foster, 1953). This huge variety of roles is again evidence of the sheer breadth of nationalities encompassed within Hollywood's 'ethnic' character parts.³²⁰ It also locates De Carlo as in-between, an ambiguous ethnic actor, complicating the character Carias' position as Mexican.

Clara Rodriguez has argued that the 1950s saw a decline in the number of depictions of Mexicans on-screen in leading 'Latin lover' and 'bombshell' roles because of the changing 'public values' of cold war culture.³²¹ The 1930s had seen greater numbers of Mexican and other Latin Americans on Hollywood screens, and Peter Stanfield has argued that the perceived threat from the sexual potency of Latin lovers and bombshells in this earlier period was tempered through comedy. Conversely, by the mid-1950s and the release of *Border River*, the lead Mexican female is made acceptable precisely because she is not played by a Mexican.³²² American enough to unite with Mattson, here Carias retains enough Mexicanness to discover her political self-determination and act on it. Negotiating the borders of nationality, Carias enjoys a powerful and active role in this western that complicates traditional archetypal female roles of the genre. Seen outside of the frontier myth, Carias' character responds to Mexican revolution and the overthrow of colonial landholdings. The complex and politically active nature of her character points to the 'centrality' of the female characters in *Border River* and *Vera Cruz*, which, as Stanfield has argued of westerns of the late 1940s, is often overlooked in accounts of the genre.³²³

Although its lead Mexican character is played by a Canadian actress, *Border River* and the other 1950s border films analysed in this thesis also drew on a large set of

³¹⁹ Wolfgang Saxon, 'Yvonne De Carlo Dies at 84; Played Lily on "Munsters,"' *New York Times*, 11 January 2007, B6.

³²⁰ For a fuller discussion of ethnicity and Hollywood, and particularly my use of the term 'ethnic,' see chapter two.

³²¹ Rodriguez, *Heroes*, 104.

³²² See Stanfield, *Westerns*, 30. Further, in other films of the period where American men travel south of the border, although they may desire Mexican women, they only form relationships with Americans. In *Out of the Past*, *Borderline*, *His Kind of Woman*, and *The Treasure of Pancho Villa*, the male Americans in Mexico always meet and fall in love with American women, despite admiring Mexican women along the way.

³²³ Stanfield, *Westerns*, 38. For examples of studies of the western focused on masculinity, see Mitchell, *Westerns* and Roderick McGillis, *He Was Some Kind of a Man: Masculinities in the B Western* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009).

Mexican and Chicano Hollywood actors. Many of the same names appear again and again across the films. *Border River* finds Mexican character actor Bedoya in a role that recalls the ‘bizarre menace’ with which Jack Lodge notes he played Humphrey Bogart’s nemesis in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (John Huston, 1948), as well as his character Cuchillo in *Border Incident*.³²⁴ Pedro Armendáriz’s General Calleja too is reminiscent of his earlier performance as the formidable José Juan Reyes in *The Torch* (Emilio Fernández, 1950). These character actors were well known to the trade press, and although certainly not household names, were respected for performing well in the often limited roles assigned to them. The critical reception of the Mexican characters in *Border River* specially emphasised the actors’ prowess. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* reported that the film was distinguished by its ‘remarkable collection of tough Mexican character players. Against such opposition, the mild-mannered Joel McCrea seems to underplay his part’. Bedoya’s performance in particular was regarded as the highlight of the film by *Today’s Cinema*, which wrote ‘[t]here is a characteristically vivid study of Mexican viciousness from Alfonso Bedoya, who dominates every scene in which he appears.’ And similarly, for *The Hollywood Reporter*, the ‘capable performances’ of Bedoya and Armendáriz deserved note.³²⁵

Border River was banned in Mexico upon its release. According to Emilio García Riera, this was specifically because of the portrayal of the Mexican characters; indeed he highlights 1953 as a year in which Hollywood produced a proliferation of Mexican bandits.³²⁶ Similarly, Alfred Richard identifies *Border River* as marking a turning point which heralded the return of the ‘Mexican bandit’ and ‘slimy stereotypes’ to American films.³²⁷ The banning of the film in Mexico is likely an indication of the falling interest Hollywood’s regulator had in controlling cinematic images of Latin America by the mid-1950s as detailed in previous chapters. Although its representation of Mexican characters was certainly felt by Mexico to be offensive, the actors’ skill and craft, and an understanding of the limitations of the roles they were working in was apparent within the US reception of the movie; *Variety* complained that Bedoya was constrained because of the fact his ‘part is a familiar one.’³²⁸ Closed and controlled, these Mexican character roles are of course written with and through stereotypes and

³²⁴ Jack Lodge, ‘Alfonso Bedoya,’ in *The BFI Companion to the Western*, revised ed., ed. Edward Buscombe (London: Andre Deutsch/British Film Institute, 1993), 319.

³²⁵ Rev. of *Border River*, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 21 (240) (1954): 55; Rev. of *Border River*, *Today’s Cinema*, 14; Rev. of *Border River*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 4 January 1954, 3.

³²⁶ García Riera, *México Visto 4*, 108.

³²⁷ Richard, *Censorship*, 479.

³²⁸ Rev. of *Border River*, *Variety*, 6 January 1954, 3.

characterisations, but this was something that the contemporary critical community was also aware of.

Mexican revolution and political contexts

Border River appeared to its contemporary audience to be a conventional civil war western, that is, all except for its Mexican location. *Today's Cinema* highlighted the film's 'novel setting,' writing that the 'narrative effectively breaks away from [the] more familiar Western pattern by placing its action in [the] colourful setting of [a] corrupt Mexican township.' *Variety* too declared it was the fact that '[Universal's] cameras move south of the border' that distinguished the picture. Likewise, for *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Border River* was 'a standard western given extra value by its setting.'³²⁹ The final section of this chapter will argue that, as in *Vera Cruz*, the Mexican setting of *Border River* is crucial for its engagement with cold war politics. The Mexican backdrop was the single most important characteristic of the film for its contemporary critics, and it is through Mexican landscapes and characters that the film negotiates issues of colonialism and revolution. The film's Mexican setting also appears to have been significant for director Sherman. A prolific and prominent B-movie director, Sherman repeatedly returned to Mexican locales and themes throughout his career. His Mexican titles include *South of the Border* (1939), *Mexicali Rose* (1939), *The Treasure of Pancho Villa* and *Last of the Fast Guns* (1958). Later in his career he would also direct pictures for Mexican and Spanish production companies.

Criticised by Richard as simply a 'let's generate sympathy for the south in the Civil War film,' on closer reading, *Border River* is considerably more ambiguous in its political position.³³⁰ Its alignment with the south is called into question through comparisons which are drawn between the Confederacy and Zona Libre's status as a separatist zone at war with the Mexican government. Bedoya's Captain Vargas sneers that just as the Americans have two governments in Lincoln and Davies, so too can Mexico. The separatist state of Zona Libre thus becomes equated with the Confederates' wishes for secession from the United States. The final taking of the town by the Juaristas also mirrors the impending Confederate defeat which is alluded to throughout the film. The hero Mattson is thus placed in a questionable position; on the

³²⁹ Rev. of *Border River*, *Today's Cinema*, 14; Rev. of *Border River*, *Variety*, 3; Rev. of *Border River*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 3.

³³⁰ Richard, *Censorship*, 479.

losing side of the war, his imperial desire for independent territory is aligned with that of the film's villain.

Mattson is thus a conflicted hero in the movie. The star persona of actor McCrea only adds to this ambiguity through his carefully crafted image as a classic western hero. McCrea made westerns a specific career choice and only acted in one non-western film after 1945. He explained this choice in a 1978 interview saying,

I always felt so much more comfortable in the Western. The minute I got a horse and a hat and a pair of boots on, I felt easier. I didn't feel like I was an actor anymore. I felt like I was the guy out there doing it.³³¹

His appearances prior to *Border River's* release included *Saddle Tramp* (Hugo Fregonese, 1950), *Cattle Drive* (Kurt Neumann, 1951) and *The Lone Hand* (George Sherman, 1953). In all of these films McCrea plays moral and heroic yet individualist characters at the centre of the narratives. Jimmie Hicks describes how McCrea deliberately shaped this image throughout his career as he rejected various offers of parts which did not fit. This included turning down the lead in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Tay Garnett, 1946) on account of the poor 'moral standards' of the character, to which McCrea's response was: 'this isn't the image that I want.'³³² McCrea's self-fashioning as a moral and upstanding western hero sits at odds with the ambiguous position of Mattson in this film.

Biographers of McCrea emphasise his conscious decisions only to play moralistic characters, and also how he modelled himself on an older generation of upstanding western heroes.³³³ Robert Nott writes that McCrea particularly admired veteran western star and Hollywood liberal Will Rogers, and the two worked together on a number of films.³³⁴ In an interview McCrea testified '[w]e stood in awe of [Rogers] and knew what he stood for ... he had an influence on every thing he touched. He brought glory to it. The behavior on the set was improved, the attitude towards America, the attitude towards Jews, the attitude towards colored people, he could do all that by his example.'³³⁵ McCrea's support for Rogers and the 'humorous critique of individualism and capitalism' that Lary May argues pervades his work, suggests that

³³¹ Quoted in Jimmie Hicks, 'Joel McCrea,' *Films in Review* 42 (11-12) (1991): 392-404.

³³² Quoted in Hicks, 'Joel McCrea,' 392-404.

³³³ See also Robert Nott, *Last of the Cowboy Heroes: The Westerns of Randolph Scott, Joel McCrea, and Andy Murphy*, foreword by Butt Boetticher (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2000).

³³⁴ Nott, *Cowboy Heroes*, 30.

³³⁵ Interview with Joel McCrea, 24 May 1970, in Will Rogers, *Will Rogers Scrapbook*, ed. Bryan B. Sterling (Grosset and Dunlop, 1976), 117. Quoted in May, *Big Tomorrow*, 46.

McCrea's love of westerns and cowboy heroes is squared against a politically liberal attitude.³³⁶ The conflicted and ambiguous politics of *Border River*, perhaps influenced by McCrea's commitments to both the individualist western hero and liberal politics, can thus be seen to echo the complex political discourses of the cold war period.

Conclusion

Despite its political ambiguities, the overarching colonial narratives through which *Border River* tells its story and negotiates the political tensions of empire and revolution are clearly identifiable. Rather than exhibiting the wide open vistas and vast plains we might expect of the western genre, *Border River* presents a closed set, full of tightly framed shots which control and pin down the spaces of the film. This chapter has argued that frontier mythology cannot therefore account for *Border River's* narrative, and that considering this film outside of frontier mythology provides new insights into the relationship between the movie and its cultural contexts. Nor does *Border River* respond to or reflect the strategies of containment identified by Nadel and Elaine May. Instead, it demonstrates the presence of another pervasive cultural narrative of this era; a concern with US government imperial rhetoric and practices. Rather than engaging with attempts to contain Mexico as a potentially subversive threat, the movie plays out a narrative of territorial seizure and reclamation, imperial ambitions and ultimately social revolution. Its ambiguous ending sees the American hero ride off with Carias, and the land taken from Calleja and returned to the people. It cannot help but recall the redistribution of land and property occupied by the United States and other nations during revolutionary upheavals in Mexico.

The colonisation of new territory and the creation of continents were always personified in early cartography and art as female, and so too in *Border River*, Calleja's attempts to control territory are depicted through his power over the female lead, Carias. Her body is mapped, bound by the closed spaces of the film, and yet, just as the territory is returned to the Juaristas, through her Mexican heritage Carias becomes politically active and self-determining within the narrative. Her centrality to the film challenges many prevailing accounts of female characters in westerns in the cold war period. With two differing takes on the politics of revolution and the US civil war, *Border River* and *Vera Cruz* nevertheless are both framed by questions of land, territory and empire. The

³³⁶ May, *Big Tomorrow*, 28.

myth of the frontier is an inadequate explanation for the way in which the films engage with their contemporary cultural contexts. In viewing the films outside of this frontier framework, and in analysing them through the cinematic location of the US-Mexico border rather than the western genre, these two chapters have argued that *Border River* and *Vera Cruz* are not related to their cold war context through genre, but rather in spite of it.

Analysing *Vera Cruz* and *Border River* through the cinematic space of the border suggests that existing western genre criticism of the cold war period is too restrictive. Moving outside of generic frameworks is therefore useful in developing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between cold war politics and cinema. The final part of the thesis will now go on to examine three films which are also concerned with questions of space and territory at the border. Set in and around border towns, these films dramatise the regulation of the border, and engage closely with the cold war relationship between the United States and Mexico.

PART THREE

Regulation: Criminality, Identity and Mobility

Chapter Six

Ethnicity, Imperialism and the Law: Policing Identities in *Border Incident* (1949)

As *Border Incident* begins, images show Mexican workers waiting to cross the borderline into the United States. A sea of faces stretch out back from the border, as the boundary's two layers of chain link fencing almost completely obscures their features. The wires of the fence intertwine, filling the screen and seeming solid and impenetrable. As the camera pulls in closer, the Mexican workers appear more clearly, yet still gridded by the wire. Imprisoned by the border, the faces of these men are mapped into place by the fence, their helplessness in the face of the American labour system underscored. As a few members of the crowd are called forward to receive work permits, hundreds of others are left dejected, hungry, homeless and with nowhere else to go. Their only option is to attempt to cross the border illicitly, and the landscape which they must traverse is fraught with danger. For *Border Incident*, this Mexican topography is dark, rocky and mountainous. Almost always filmed at night, its jagged irregular skylines and shadowed valleys are nightmarish and sinister, threatening the lives of the Mexicans who attempt to cross it.

With this opening, *Border Incident* clearly attempts to evoke a sense of the dangers and injustices faced by Mexican migrants who enter the United States without proper documentation. However, the contemporary media environment was often considerably more hostile towards both undocumented and official migrants. A small selection of the many headlines featured in the early 1950s includes: 'Peons in the West Lowering Culture,' 'Wetbacks Cross at Two a Minute,' and 'Mexicans Convert Border into Sieve.'³³⁷ This period in American history saw huge changes in terms of migration and border policy; as we have seen in earlier chapters, the wartime bracero program persisted long into the post-Second World War period as farmers in the US south continued to need the cheap and flexible labour provided by the Mexican workers.³³⁸ The continuation of the official programme also led to increasing numbers of

³³⁷ Headlines taken from the *New York Times*, 27 March 1951, 31; 16 April 1953, 31; 27 March 1950, 1.

³³⁸ See chapter three for more detail on the history of Mexican migration to the US.

undocumented workers, and the two types of migrant were often conflated in media representations such as the above headlines. *Border Incident* attempts to delineate between the two types of migrant workers, and rather than flatly condemning undocumented migration, it presents, as the opening narration pointedly attests, ‘a tale of human suffering and injustice about which you should know.’

Just as they are imprisoned behind the border fence at the film’s opening, the braceros’ spatial fixity is a visual motif that runs throughout the film. These initial scenes emphasise the border’s physical role as barrier and highlight its function as a regulator of movement. This chapter and the two that follow are specifically focused on ideas of regulation in border films. The themes of mobility and movement have run throughout the thesis, with part one concentrating on tourism and travel, and part two on political movements and revolution. Through its focus on regulation, part three of the thesis will now make mobility extant in analyses which centre on movement and power. John Urry has written about the connections between mobility and power, arguing that ‘multiple mobilities become central to the structuring of inequality’.³³⁹ While Urry claims it is the case in the twenty-first century that ‘there are increasingly few restraints upon states and private corporations seeking to, and succeeding in, monitoring, regulating and limiting people’s right to movement,’ in this part of the thesis I will suggest that regulation of movement was also central to the United States’ relationship with Mexico in the cold war period.³⁴⁰ *Border Incident*’s braceros make the connections between these different levels of mobilities and inequality explicit. As Peter Adey has argued, mobility is also inextricably related to participation in politics and political movements.³⁴¹ This final part of the thesis will therefore also explore the political regulations which these films faced, and continue the investigations into censorship bodies, personal politics and constructions of identity which have run throughout the thesis.

This chapter picks up the topic of migration first discussed in chapter three, and explores how it relates to regulation and policing in a border town. As in chapters seven and eight that follow, the connections between regulation and mobility are important in *Border Incident*, particularly in terms of the fate faced by undocumented braceros in the narrative. *Border Incident* takes place at the Calexico-Mexicali borderline and presents a narrative which repeatedly moves back and forth across the international boundary,

³³⁹ Urry, *Mobilities*, 186.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 205.

³⁴¹ Adey, *Mobility*, 88-89.

both within the town which is divided through the middle, and in the nearby rural borderlands. Whilst it undoubtedly portrays the US as technologically advanced in comparison to its southern neighbour, the clear hero of the film is not an American cop but rather his Mexican counterpart. This chapter argues that through *Border Incident's* mobile engagement with colonial practices and ethnicity at the border, concerns over global American intervention in the Cold War emerge.

The first section of the chapter argues that *Border Incident's* narrative of labour critiques business practices in the American south. It develops an understanding of braceros as colonial subjects through an analysis of the narrative and visual representations which regulate the Mexican workers. The mobility of those able to cross the boundary freely in the film is starkly contrasted with the entrapment of the braceros, whose stasis leads eventually to disappearance. Examining existing criticism of *Border Incident* as film noir, this section further argues that this film provides evidence of politically complex filmmaking during a period in which noir is considered apolitical or conservative by critics such as Peter Lev and Andrew Spicer. The second section of the chapter moves on to consider the similarities and contrasts between the United States and Mexico in the movie. Through an analysis of the landscape and spaces of the film, it argues that American technological superiority is championed. But despite its clear delineation between the US and Mexico in terms of American modernity, *Border Incident* also works to equate the institutions of the two countries. This part of the chapter argues that the post-Second World War focus on institutions and wartime good neighborly policies form important backdrops which regulate the film's representation of the United States and Mexico. I suggest that the tension between displays of co-operation and cultural difference is also indicative of the cold war relationship between the two countries. The final section of the chapter centres on issues of ethnicity and identity in *Border Incident*. It asserts that Ricardo Montalban (who would later become a vociferous proponent of the Chicano civil rights movement) is clearly positioned as the hero of the film, and examines the significance of this in terms of broader Hollywood representations of Latin Americans on screen at this time.

Colonial subjectivity and political noir

It is surely an indication of the high levels of public concern around undocumented Mexican workers at this time that a film was made specifically about the

issue. Set on the border between the towns of Calexico and Mexicali, 1949's *Border Incident* tells the story of two police officers, one American and one Mexican, who join forces to bring down a criminal syndicate smuggling undocumented migrants into the US. The first major Hollywood film to take Mexican migration directly as its subject matter, it sees Mexican officer Pablo Rodriguez (Montalban) go undercover as a bracero who is smuggled across the border with other Mexican workers. In the United States, the Mexicans face exploitation and imprisonment at the hands of a criminal gang headed by an American ranch owner, Owen Parkson (Howard Da Silva). The American agent Jack Bearnese (George Murphy) also goes undercover as a criminal with access to stolen crossing permits which he attempts to sell on to the smugglers. Outed as an officer of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS), Bearnese is killed, while Rodriguez defeats the criminals in a final showdown in the deadly 'canyon de la muerte.'

In an important early critical study of the bracero program, Ernesto Galarza argued that the system formed 'the prototype of the production man of the future,' with the individual bracero representing 'an almost perfect model of the economic man, an "input factor" stripped of the political and social attributes that liberal democracy likes to ascribe to all human beings ideally.'³⁴² This machinistic imagining of the Mexican workers foregrounds the paradox of bracero non-citizenship; their bodies are welcomed into the United States but are stripped of all human rights and attributes upon arrival. Building on this idea, in her study of undocumented Latin American migration to the United States, Mae M. Ngai argues that the system of Mexican labour in the US south during the Cold War functioned as a 'kind of imported colonialism, which constructed Mexicans working in the United States as a foreign race and justified their exclusion from the polity.'³⁴³ For Ngai, both the official bracero program and the regular use of undocumented migrants by ranch owners served to construct Mexicans as colonial subjects and outsiders. She argues that undocumented migrants constitute 'a social reality and a legal impossibility,' as subjects 'barred from citizenship and without rights.'³⁴⁴ *Border Incident* is closely concerned with the paradoxes facing undocumented braceros in the United States, although ultimately it cannot provide any answers to these questions. The film constructs its braceros precisely as colonial

³⁴² Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story: An Account of the Managed Migration of Mexican Farm Workers in California, 1942-1960* (1964; repr., New York: McNally and Loftin, 1972), 16.

³⁴³ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton and Woodstock: Woodstock University Press, 2004), 95.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

subjects who are subjected to enslavement and exploitation. The fact that the film's action takes place on territory that formerly belonged to Mexico adds a further imperial dimension to the injustices faced by the braceros.³⁴⁵

In his analysis of *Border Incident*, Jonathan Auerbach argues that the undocumented braceros occupy a position of 'radical geopolitical dislocation and estrangement' in the US, which he terms a form of 'noir citizenship'.³⁴⁶ Developing this argument further in his book *Dark Borders*, Auerbach contends that *Border Incident* 'is especially important for articulating [a] condition of statelessness or dispossession... dramatizing the anxieties of a nation-state intent on policing itself against uninvited outsiders at midcentury.'³⁴⁷ For Auerbach, *Border Incident*'s engagement with questions of national identity situates it at the heart of debates around Americanness and the un-American in the cold war climate. His discussion of un-Americanness is also useful for understanding the role of the border in the film:

Rather than classifying ontologically a type of person or trait, *un-American* functioned strictly by negation, a canceling out or reversing of a more nebulous set of ideals. The prefix *un-* is so strange because it, unlike *anti-*, cannot signify any specific grounds for difference: to be *un-American* is not simply to be hostile toward or positioned against American values from some identifiable alternative perspective, but rather to somehow embody the very opposite of 'America.'³⁴⁸

According to Auerbach's reading, American cold war concerns about infiltration by enemies are played out precisely through the label 'un-American,' which situates the divide between friends and foe along national boundaries. Although Auerbach makes a strong case for this interpretation of *Border Incident* in the context of film noir's relationship to American politics, my argument here is slightly different. While *Border Incident* can certainly be read as noir with its dark visual palette, detective narrative and themes of isolation, I argue below that it is also usefully understood as a semi-documentary police procedural which is closely related to Anthony Mann's earlier film *T-Men* (1948). As a border film, *Border Incident*'s relationship with the political climate of the cold war United States is marked by its comparisons and contrasts

³⁴⁵ As described in previous chapters, the American-Mexican war ended with Mexico being forced to cede almost a third of its territory to the US in 1848, including all of the land now known as California where the action on the US side of the border takes place in the film.

³⁴⁶ Jonathan Auerbach, 'Noir Citizenship: Anthony Mann's *Border Incident*,' *Cinema Journal* 47 (4) (2008): 112. Emphasis in original.

³⁴⁷ Auerbach, *Dark Borders*, 124.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

between the US and Mexico. It is specifically the representation of this relationship between the two countries that allows the movie to call into question American influence and interventions south of the border by presenting them as colonial practices. The role of American institutions in policing and regulating the use of migrant workers is concurrently celebrated.

The critical attention that *Border Incident* has received to date most often addresses it as part of the film noir cycle.³⁴⁹ Writing of noir's political attributes, Lev claims that by the 1950s, this style of filmmaking 'became either apolitical or an expression of the anti-Communist hysteria of the time.'³⁵⁰ Lev argues that at this time, 'critical social commentary was largely limited to indirect expressions in adventure genres such as the western and science fiction', excluding the possibility of critical agendas in other genres.³⁵¹ Similarly, Spicer alleges that the 1950s saw the rise of a 'right-wing agenda in numerous noirs whose overriding theme is enforcement of law and order.'³⁵² Spicer defines these right-wing noirs as 'semidocumentaries,' claiming they 'celebrated the vigilance, hard work, and courage of American institutions' which see 'government agents or policemen root out and destroy "the enemy".'³⁵³ While *Border Incident* would certainly fit within Spicer's categorisation in terms of its semi-documentary style and focus on law, order and institutions, it also offers precisely the form of critical commentary that Spicer and Lev find missing from this type of movie.

James Naremore's reading of the politics of the noir cycle is more usefully ambivalent. Naremore attests that noir's roots lie in the 'left culture of the Roosevelt years – a culture that was repressed, marginalized and virtually extinguished during the postwar decade, as noir took on increasingly cynical and even right wing

³⁴⁹ For examples of noir interpretations of *Border Incident* see Auerbach, 'Noir Citizenship,' and *Dark Borders*; James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2008), 233 and Imogen Sara Smith, *In Lonely Places: Film Noir Beyond the City* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011), 146. Although the label noir was not used at the time of *Border Incident*'s release, it is still useful to consider the arguments of those critics who analyse the film through this generic framework in order to argue against such restrictive generic categorisations and claims.

³⁵⁰ Lev, *Fifties*, 53.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁵² Andrew Spicer, *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 261.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 261. Although Spicer includes semi-documentaries within his definition of noir, Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton specifically contend these films are not noir. Using *Border Incident* as an example of a 'non-noir' that uses noir techniques and themes, Borde and Chaumeton contend that '[o]ften a noir detail in a non-noir is simply due to a realist orientation.' *A Panorama of American Film Noir (1941-1953)*, trans. Paul Hammond, introduction by James Naremore (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002), 113. My intention here is not to argue whether or not *Border Incident* should be classified as a noir, but rather to use existing generically centred debates about the film to expose what restrictions these may place on our understanding of it.

implications.³⁵⁴ However, he also asserts that ‘the noir category viewed as a whole has no essential politics.’³⁵⁵ *Border Incident* is a film which falls on the cusp of the transitional period within noir identified by these critics, and in line with Naremore, this film’s political position cannot be simply defined as left or right; there are no ‘essential politics’ to these border films. But of this does not preclude that *Border Incident* and the other films examined in the thesis engage with political issues in a multitude of complex and interesting ways.

The opening of the film presents a sequence of documentary footage of the border which presages the main action of the narrative. These initial shots show dark mountains, rocky crevasses and the ominous barbed-wire fence of the border in silhouette. Next, as the narrative action begins, two men are shown escaping across the border from the US back into Mexico, only to be accosted by a band of menacing riders, their horses steaming and rearing in the night. The fleeing men are murdered, stripped of their money and possessions and thrown into a quagmire of quicksand where they are ingested by the churning earth. Auerbach has described this quicksand incident as ‘a kind of birth in reverse, as the sinking, bloodied Mexicans quite literally return to the motherland from whence they came’.³⁵⁶ But this return to the dangerous Mexican terrain at the behest of villainous Americans also establishes a metaphorical comment on the invisibility of the plight of Mexican workers. Literally disappearing in the borderlands, the film highlights the fate faced by many Mexicans as they attempt to cross into the US, as well as the invisibility of their place in American society.

The journey across the border undertaken by Rodriguez is equally perilous. While posing as a bracero waiting for a crossing permit, Rodriguez befriends a young Mexican worker, Juan Garcia (James Mitchell). After deciding to attempt to enter the United States illicitly, the two are bundled into the back of a truck with other braceros. During their treacherous night-time journey, one of the men dies, only to be dumped out onto the ground by a criminal henchman and left behind. Upon their arrival in the US, the men are set to work at Parkson’s ranch while they await forged documents and onward shipping. The power and reach of Parkson’s empire is significant. With agents on both sides of the border, he appears to dominate the provision of braceros to the entire farming industry in the region, but also controls bars and shops in both Mexicali and Calexico, and a network of people smugglers and informants across the whole area.

³⁵⁴ Naremore, *More than Night*, 104.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁵⁶ Auerbach, ‘Noir Citizenship,’ 107.

Parkson is vicious and violent in his pursuit of capitalist gains, manipulating the conditions of the border and Mexicans in order to further his business. Upon arrival at his ranch, the braceros are informed they will only be paid 25 cents an hour, just a third of the 75 cents promised them before the journey across the border. As Garcia protests about the wages, Parkson's chief stooge Jeff Amboy (Charles McGraw) illustrates the level of estrangement the Mexicans face, shouting 'you come in here like a crook, break our laws and expect to be treated like one of us?' This colonial construction is the perfect arrangement for Parkson and his business; Mexicans desperate for work are tempted with tales of good pay and remuneration to cross into the United States without documents. Even though Parkson facilitates the workers' illicit crossing of the border in the first place, upon arrival, he has only to remind the braceros that they entered the country unofficially in order to reassert total control over them.

Just as the braceros were shown imprisoned by the border fence at the film's opening, throughout the movie there is an emphasis on borders and dividing lines. The filmic space is rife with fences that march across the screen, marking the limits of fields and ranches. Signs are another frequent feature, including notices along the borderline that demarcate the division between the two countries with lines and arrows. In this way, Tom Conley finds that the film shouts "[s]top, look, and listen": be aware of the compositional frame, the multifarious borders in the landscape, and note that the spaces and territories embody limit-situations and experiences'.³⁵⁷ The limiting of the braceros' lives and freedoms is clearly played out in the demarcated landscapes of the film. As they work in huge fields, long aerial tracking shots show workers moving along regimented lines of crops. These images emphasise the angular, gridded nature of the fields and the straight line of the canal which runs alongside them. Clearly contrasted with the dark, undulating landscape of Mexico, the ordered and modern US terrain traps the Mexican workers in a different way, enclosing them within the gridlines of the fields.³⁵⁸ They are unable to escape their position fixed outside of citizenship within this imperialist labour system.

³⁵⁷ Tom Conley, 'Border Incidence,' *Symploke* 15 (1-2) (2007): 112.

³⁵⁸ Geiger has examined aerial views in American cinema in the post-war period, arguing that they articulate a form of American nationalism. Following this idea, for *Border Incident*, the aerial view is bound up with ideas of both American modernity and a celebration of institutions through the precise, geometric visions of American farmland, at the expense of the trapped Mexican workers. Jeffrey Geiger, 'Adrenaline Views: Rethinking Aerial Affect' (paper presented at the School of Film, Television and Media research seminar series, University of East Anglia, 29 April 2013).

‘Two great republics’: policing the divide

The divisions in the filmic space also designate *Border Incident*'s central distinction between official, documented workers and illicit undocumented ones. A fine line separates them, and the difference lies only in paper work permits. These crossing cards or work permits play a significant role in the narrative of the film. In order to catch the criminals and trace the whereabouts of the undocumented braceros, the immigration service employs the use of marked work permits, sold on to the smugglers by Bearnes. The criminal gang are unable to move their undocumented braceros without obtaining these false permits, so it is through the marked papers that the immigration authorities identify and track down undocumented migrants, as well as the criminals smuggling them across the border. *Border Incident*'s permits are entitled 'Record of Admission and Registration of Alien Laborer,' and have spaces for name, address, place of birth, identifying marks, details of the employer, a photograph and finger print. Christian Parenti has identified the rise of police photography, fingerprinting, and the documentation of other such 'distinguishing features' as practices which worked to 'construct "insider" and "outsider" identities.'³⁵⁹ Parenti argues that the history of identification is intrinsically bound up with differentiation between people and the construction of others. He traces the emergence of identification documents in the US back to the passes that were issued to newcomers to colonies and on through the advent of slave passes in the mid-seventeenth century.³⁶⁰

In *Border Incident*, without the correct papers, the Mexican migrants are lost to the criminals' system, and are left as colonial subjects with no recourse to help. Although they are freed from Parkson's enslavement at the end of the movie, the film has no answer for their plight. Cutting swiftly from the scenes in the canyon where the undocumented braceros help kill the villains and save Rodriguez from the quicksand, the action moves on to the final sweeping aerial shots of farmland. Presumably those braceros discovered without correct documentation were deported back to Mexico, back to wait in vain with the hundreds of other desperate people for a permit that may never come. *Border Incident*'s crossing cards police the braceros' identities and bodies through their documentation and classification practices. Through the documentation of

³⁵⁹ Christian Parenti, *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America from Slavery to the War on Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 42; 39.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

their bodies, they are identified as outsiders in identificatory practices which link back to colonial enslavement.

The braceros' status as outsiders is also foregrounded through their identification as criminals throughout the film; their presence in the country breaks the law, and they are positioned as illicit and outside of the US body politic. Historically, migrants and immigrants have always been closely aligned with criminals through practices such as fingerprinting. As Simon Cole has shown, fingerprinting initially emerged for the dual purpose of identifying both criminals and immigrants.³⁶¹ For *Border Incident*, the crossing cards not only police the braceros' national identities but also position them as criminals, defining their presence in the US as criminal. In a move which solidifies the connection between the braceros and criminals, one of the film's central marketing suggestions for distributors of the feature was to display 'effective "WANTED" posters around your foyer using stills of the four "crooks" in BORDER INCIDENT.'³⁶² The wanted posters provided for exhibitors feature mug shots of Parkson, Cuchillo and Zopilote from the criminal gang, but also that of Juan, the bracero.

Differences between Mexicans and Americans and their respective nations are inscribed in the landscapes of the countries but also through the presence of technology and objects of modernity in *Border Incident*. Upon its release, contemporary reviews described the film as a 'semi-documentary,' 'a commonplace cops and villains' tale,' 'a straight hard-action meller,' and 'a grim, realistic and tragic drama.'³⁶³ While many of the critics discussed above have since identified it as film noir, I argue that *Border Incident* is also usefully considered alongside critical work on semi-documentary police procedurals. In addition to the fact it was classified as 'semi-documentary' and 'realistic' in its contemporary reception, the film proclaims itself based on true events, adopts a realist filmmaking style and features an emphasis on technology and institutions. Mann attested that the template for the movie was indeed drawn from that of his earlier film, *T-Men*, and there are certainly major similarities in the narratives

³⁶¹ Simon Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 121.

³⁶² *Border Incident* press pack, British Film Institute National Archive, 1949, 5. Capitalisation in original.

³⁶³ Charles J. Lazarus, Rev. of *Border Incident*, *Motion Picture Herald Product Digest*, 27 August 1949, 4730; Bosley Crowther, 'Border Incident, Adventure Film about U.S. Immigration Service, Opens at Globe,' Rev. of *Border Incident*, *New York Times*, 21 November 1949, 29; Rev. of *Border Incident*, *Variety*, 31 August 1949, 8; 'Grim Adventures on Mexican Border,' Rev. of *Border Incident*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 26 August 1949, 4.

which both feature government officials working to catch criminals and solve crimes.³⁶⁴ Both movies focus on the technologies of police work and often centre visually on radio equipment, monitors and other machines. This ‘special emphasis upon technologically advanced surveillance techniques’ is a crucial identifier of the police procedural for William Luhr.³⁶⁵ The procedural and semi-documentary forms were also inexorably linked at this point in time. As Will Straw argues, ‘[v]irtually all the semi-documentaries of the postwar period revolved around public institutions’.³⁶⁶

Martin Rubin has claimed that semi-documentary and procedural films ‘carr[y] over wartime spirit into postwar life.’³⁶⁷ Comprised of both semi-documentary and procedural elements, *Border Incident* can, like *T-Men*, be seen as part of a wave of post-Second World War movies which continued to foreground the importance of the work and modernity of state institutions such as the police. In his more historically grounded account of the genre, Straw argues that while ‘the institutional focus of the semi-documentary sprang in part from the faith in professionalized knowledge, it came, as well, from the earnest efforts of (mostly) progressive filmmakers to produce films that exalted collective over individual action.’³⁶⁸ Although *Border Incident* certainly does emphasise the importance of institutions and collective actions, as the final section of the chapter will argue, the film also has a clear individual hero in Montalban/Rodriguez.³⁶⁹ Through his ethnic and political identities, Montalban/Rodriguez transcends Frank Krutnik’s formulation of individuals as simply ‘necessary but necessarily regulated’ parts of the system in semidocumentaries and procedurals.³⁷⁰ Through Rodriguez, as well as the objects of modern technology which are used by both government institutions and individual criminals, the film’s interaction with ideas of individualism and collectivity is more complex.

It is not just the police that make use of modern technologies in *Border Incident*, as there is also a great emphasis on the objects and machinery used by the criminals. A police control room receives special focus as professional knowledge embodied in shiny metal banks of machines helps officers track the criminals’ whereabouts. But Parkson and his stooges also make use of complex technologies collectively to run their

³⁶⁴ Christopher Wicking and Barrie Pattison, ‘Interviews with Anthony Mann,’ *Screen* 10 (4-5) (1969): 37.

³⁶⁵ William Luhr, ‘Experiment in Terror: Dystopian Modernism, the Police Procedural, and the Space of Anxiety,’ in *Cinema and Modernity*, 176.

³⁶⁶ Will Straw, ‘Documentary Realism and the Postwar Left,’ in “*Un-American*” *Hollywood*, 139.

³⁶⁷ Martin Rubin, *Thrillers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 243.

³⁶⁸ Straw, ‘Documentary Realism,’ 139.

³⁶⁹ Again, this actor/character formulation is borrowed from McDonald, *Hollywood Stardom*.

³⁷⁰ Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1991), 204.

operation. In order to get across the border safely, networks of lookout scouts hide up in the mountainous Mexican landscape, signalling with a system of lights and radio handsets to let the driver of the bracero truck know when the coast is clear. Parkson uses a recording machine in his business dealings, which, when discovered by Mexican henchmen Zopilote (Arnold Moss) and Cuchillo (Alfonso Bedoya), replays a message dictated by him concerning the price of braceros. However, further emphasising the gap between the US' technological superiority and Mexico's primitiveness, the bandits are mystified by the disembodied voice and unable to operate the machinery properly. Technology and collective actions also bring about Bearnes' demise; it is the spread of Parkson's networks across the country that enables his contact in Kansas to uncover the INS plot. When this contact phones through his information, Parkson orders Bearnes brutally murdered.

In this sequence, Bearnes is marched out into a dark field which is flat and still with regimented furrows of dirt spanning out across the screen. Parkson's henchman Amboy shoots Bearnes as he tries to escape and then starts up a nearby tractor towing a plough. The tractor lights bear down on Bearnes, disabled by the gunshot, as successive quick camera shots draw the menacing machine ever closer to him. The plough starts up, and the camera closes in on its sharp shining blades as they churn and slice the earth. After an excruciating wait, the tractor reaches Bearnes and passes over him. With his last terrible expression of tortuous horror, he is ploughed into the earth, the very same fate met by the braceros on the Mexican side of the border as they disappeared into the roiling quicksand. The tractor burns bright with horrific lights and shunting metalwork, revealing objects of modern technology to be dangerous and deadly in the wrong hands. When not policed and used within the law, modern technology proves fatal.

Despite clearly positioning the US as a more modern and technologically advanced country than Mexico (although such technology is not always put to positive use), *Border Incident* also stresses the similarities between the two nations and the effectiveness of their collective efforts to catch criminals. Just as the semi-documentary and procedural elements of the movie lend a wartime spirit of the celebration of government institutions, wartime efforts by the film industry to appeal to Latin American markets also seem to permeate its narrative. During the Second World War, movies such as Orson Welles' unfinished *It's All True* (1942-1943), and Disney's *Saludos Amigos* (Wilfred Jackson et al, 1942) were specifically commissioned by the

US government to build support for the war effort in Latin America.³⁷¹ It was critical that Latin America sided with the Allies, so efforts were made to build alliances within the continent by presenting positive cultural images of the US to Latin America, and, at the same time, showing positive images of Latin Americans within the United States. Thus Hollywood was engaged in President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. So much so, that, as Brian O'Neill notes, it 'came to be known unofficially as Hollywood's Good Neighbor Policy.'³⁷² In line with this policy, alongside its remit to monitor images of sex, violence and amorality, Hollywood's self-regulator the PCA was engaged with 'equal fervor' in improving images of Latin Americans in Hollywood films at this time.³⁷³

Hollywood also had clear economic motives in ensuring that films would sell in Latin America as it was fast becoming one of the industry's most important foreign markets during this period. In a special feature on Latin American stars, a movie magazine declared that faced with 'shrinking markets elsewhere, the courtship between Hollywood and Latin America is on again. Latin American stars are being imported by the boatload.'³⁷⁴ Alfred Richard has argued that the PCA was at its most effective between 1935 and 1955, and that during this time, it 'affected every [Latin American image] portrayed.'³⁷⁵ *Border Incident* was, according to Richard, greeted by the PCA as a 'sympathetic treatment of the issue' of Mexican migration, which was very much in line with their agenda.³⁷⁶ He argues that the office sought to promote themes of 'the unity and likeness of peoples in both hemispheres,' an ambition which perhaps directly influenced *Border Incident*'s narrative.³⁷⁷

Although the film does construct differences between the US and Mexico in landscape and technology, it also displays a striking effort to emphasise the parity between the police and governmental forces of the two countries, possibly as a result of these wartime governmental policies. One of the central ways in which this takes place is through the comparison drawn between the two officers, Rodriguez and Bearnese. At the start of the film, the officials are both shown travelling to their meeting at the border

³⁷¹ Adams, 'Saludos Amigos,' 289-295. *It's All True* and Hollywood's role in enlisting Latin American support during the Second World War is discussed in more detail in chapter eight.

³⁷² Brian O'Neill, 'The Demands of Authenticity: Addison Durland and Hollywood's Latin Images During World War II,' in *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001), 359.

³⁷³ Adams, 'Saludos Amigos,' 291.

³⁷⁴ Raymond Del Castillo, 'The End of the Latin Lover?' *Picturegoer*, 2 August 1947, 11.

³⁷⁵ Richard, *Censorship*, xxi.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 392.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, xxix.

by aeroplane, in almost perfectly symmetrical sequences. It is at this point that the narrative makes the co-operation between the two countries most explicit as the officers confer and decide to ‘work together to enforce the law.’ The meeting takes place around a glass-topped table and the officers sit facing one another, framed in such a way as to appear like mirror images, an effect which is further emphasised by their reflections in the table surface. The script in this scene is full of metaphors of circularity which operate to depict the two countries working in a perfect, equal symbiosis. The Mexican Colonel Raphael Alvarado (Martin Garralaga) explains, ‘since the criminals work in a circle, we will cover the circle,’ as a globe in the room looms large in the shot. The collective, global emphasis of the police institutions’ efforts is aligned with the image of the continent of America as a whole, diminishing the separation between the United States and Mexico.³⁷⁸

Border Incident is bookended by such narratives of equality, with a similar final ceremony showing officers of both police forces present and congratulating each other as Rodriguez and Bearnese (posthumously) are awarded medals. The crossed flags of the two countries fill the screen as the camera pulls back, celebrating an equal partnership and the collective work of the two states. As the image then fades to reveal aerial tracking shots of braceros working in geometric American fields, the voiceover intones that these Mexican workers are now ‘safe and secure living under the protection of two great republics.’ For *Border Incident*, when the two nations are operating as equal partners, the exploitation of braceros is eradicated and they are treated fairly. However, the movie cannot offer any solution for its undocumented workers who are simply ejected from the United States and apparently forgotten. The film’s publicity materials also emphasise the equivalence of the two male police officers; Montalban and Murphy are given equal billing on the posters which feature their faces framed again as mirror images of each other. But despite their similarity in the promotional materials, it is certainly Montalban’s character and performance that steals the show itself. While the film celebrates the effective collaboration of the United States and Mexico and lauds the collective efforts of the police forces, it nevertheless presents a clearly individualised Mexican hero.

³⁷⁸ As an interesting counterpoint to this thesis’ discussion of the ways in which the US imagines its place in the world, Joyce Chaplin argues that historical acts of circumnavigation of the globe had a profound effect on the American relationship to the rest of the world but also to the physical planet. Joyce E. Chaplin, ‘Planetary Power? The United States and the History of Around the World Travel,’ *Journal of American Studies* 47 (2013): 1-21.

Representing Mexicanness: identity politics

Modern farm technology may lead to the untimely demise of *Border Incident's* American agent, but his Mexican counterpart lives to see the end of the movie and defeats the bad guys in the process. Bearnes is subject to repeated beatings and torture in the film, and remains imprisoned for much of the time at Parkson's ranch. In contrast, Rodriguez is active and mobile throughout, occupying a far more significant role in the film's narrative. Montalban conspicuously outplays his American partner, and it is his name that appears first in the credits. As we have seen in earlier chapters, Clara Rodriguez has argued that during the post-Second World War period, Latin American characters, and lead characters in particular, were becoming far less prevalent in Hollywood films. Moving away from the more 'positive' images of Latin Americans which she contends characterise 1930s and 1940s Hollywood movies, in the 1950s, 'many of the films that featured Latino characters... focused on social problems and were steeped in historical myths, machismo, or stereotypes of Latin lovers and Latina bombshells.'³⁷⁹ Neither mythic, macho, nor a 'Latin lover,' Montalban's character in *Border Incident* is thus an unusual lead role for this time. Rodriguez asserts that the Latin American actors working during this period could choose either to 'Europeanize their images' or 'play up the stereotypes' in order to get work in the industry.³⁸⁰ She claims that although the Latin lover and bombshell roles 'were in many ways desirable,' the roles were often 'morally inferior and ended up reinforcing the comfortable American status quo that relegated [Latin American actors] to the back seat.'³⁸¹

Despite this increasingly difficult climate for Latin American actors in Hollywood, Rodriguez contends that Montalban worked to fashion a career and star persona which enabled him to embrace his Mexican heritage, become a respected actor and pursue political activities.³⁸² Before he was cast as the lead in *Border Incident*, Montalban's earlier films with MGM, *Fiesta* (Richard Thorpe, 1947), *On An Island with You* (Richard Thorpe, 1948) and *The Kissing Bandit* (Laslo Benedek, 1949) saw him singing, dancing and lovemaking in what Rodriguez has described as 'quintessential Latin lover' roles.³⁸³ *Border Incident's* press strategy focused on the fact

³⁷⁹ Rodriguez, *Heroes*, 110.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 178-179.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 112.

that he was now moving away from such roles to become a serious actor. Yet the narratives around Montalban's presence in the film do not make his Mexicanness invisible, but articulate it in a new way. Publicity articles published in the film's press kit boast:

he was apparently forever the ideal musi-comedy hero, dark, dashing debonair [...] until Director Anthony Mann and Nicholas Nayfack...began selecting their cast. Tests indicated that Montalban in dirty blue overalls was even more compelling than in Technicolor spectacles. The fire he had whipped into his dances blazed through just as brilliantly in trigger-quick dramatic scenes.

Ricardo Montalban turns his back on his erstwhile musical-comedy dancing assignments to give a ruthless force and conviction to the part of the Mexican investigator.³⁸⁴

The language here clearly moves Montalban away from his erstwhile Latin lover image, inaugurating instead his 'brand-new Hollywood career as a dramatic actor.'³⁸⁵ Tropes of Mexicanness are drawn upon through the evocation of a fiery Latin spirit and claims that his dramatic talent 'blazed' onto the screen. Montalban's Mexicanness is also emphasised through the film's claims to Mexican authenticity. The fact that he was born in Mexico City is highlighted elsewhere in the publicity material, while he is also bestowed with the moniker of 'Mexico's film idol.'³⁸⁶

An article in *Picturegoer* magazine published just before *Border Incident's* release similarly recognises Montalban as the exemplar of a 'new approach to the Latin star.'³⁸⁷ Entitled 'The End of the Latin Lover?' the article postulates verbosely that 'the proverbial Latin lover of the prewar days...is a thing of the past...The new generation of Latin stars taken to Hollywood are more remarkable for their dramatic ability than for any particular ability to gaze at their leading ladies with the soulful eyes of a love-sick gazelle.'³⁸⁸ Featuring a photograph of Montalban and his wife Georgina at home with their baby daughter, the article presents an image of him as a serious Mexican actor set to take Hollywood by storm. His Mexicanness is not played up or made invisible, and his heritage and acting prowess are emphasised through reference to his successful Mexican productions, notably *Nosotros* [Us] (Fernando Rivero, 1945) for which he won a major award. Montalban would later go on to found the political campaign group

³⁸⁴ *Border Incident* press pack, 2-3.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁸⁷ Del Castillo, 'Latin Lover,' 11.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

Nosotros, which pressured the film industry to ‘change the portrayal of Chicanos on screen.’³⁸⁹ In his own words, the group campaigned for equality in casting for Mexicans and Chicanos and ‘simply asked that such people be *considered* for acting opportunities.’³⁹⁰ Victoria Thomas stresses that Montalban’s efforts to advance Chicano rights within the film industry date from his first arrival in Hollywood, throughout his early Latin lover roles and beyond.³⁹¹

Given *Border Incident*’s subject matter we can perhaps assume that Montalban approved, to some extent, of the character of Rodriguez, as well as the narrative highlighting the oppression of undocumented braceros. Indeed, it appears that the script was chosen by its filmmakers specifically because of its social concerns and liberal approach. Produced by veteran social problem filmmaker Dore Schary, Auerbach argues that ‘*Border Incident* presumably appealed to the liberal Schary less for its police plot ... than for its representation of a disadvantaged group’s oppression.’³⁹² Mann too was a prominent liberal figure in Hollywood, and part of a group of newly emerging directors in the post-war period who championed ‘social realism and left-liberalism,’ according to film historian Thomas Schatz.³⁹³ With a ‘progressive political agenda and a strong interest in film realism,’ these filmmakers strove to make movies which dealt with social problems and issues in a realist style.³⁹⁴ During the HUAC investigations of the early 1950s, both the film’s assistant director Howard Koch and actor Howard Da Silva were blacklisted because of their left-wing activities.³⁹⁵ *Border Incident*’s filmmakers seem to have been drawn to it because of its progressive themes, and their left-wing political agenda likely impacted on the focus on oppression and ethnicity as well as the semi-documentary style. Although it was almost certainly influenced by good neighborly and economic imperatives to present images of Latin America that reflected the unity of the continent, *Border Incident* also appears to have been a project of political importance to its filmmakers.

³⁸⁹ Charles M. Tatum, *Chicano Popular Culture: Que Hable el Pueblo* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press), 58.

³⁹⁰ Ricardo Montalban with Bob Thomas, *Reflections: A Life in Two Worlds* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1980), 151. Emphasis in original.

³⁹¹ Victoria Thomas, *Hollywood’s Latin Lovers: Latino, Italian and French Men Who Make the Screen Smolder* (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 1998), 68-70.

³⁹² Auerbach, *Dark Borders*, 126.

³⁹³ Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 382.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 382.

³⁹⁵ Auerbach, ‘Noir Citizenship,’ 117, n. 3.

Despite the liberal influences of the PCA alongside input from Montalban, Schary, Mann and others, *Border Incident* retains several crude Mexican bandit characters. Played by regular character actors Moss, Bedoya and José Torvay, characters Zopilote, Cuchillo and Pocoloco embody the typical dirty, sleazy and dangerous bandidos found in the mountainous regions of Hollywood's Mexico. Although just three women feature in the entire picture – and each only very fleetingly at that – the crooks still find time to slobber at them while keeping up with their day job cutting the throats of unsuspecting braceros. This trio of actors feature regularly in American films set on or south of the border, and appear in several other movies analysed in the thesis.³⁹⁶ As was the case with *Border River* (chapter five), it is often the character actors who are highlighted in *Border Incident*'s contemporary critical reviews, where they are praised for their efforts in spite of the brutish roles they are ascribed. *Variety* found Moss 'first-rate' in *Border Incident*, while the *New York Times* highlighted Moss and Bedoya for their 'amusing' portrayal of 'venal Mexicans.'³⁹⁷ The characters' names too seem so exaggerated as to be caricatures, with Zopilote, Cuchillo and Pocoloco translating respectively as 'vulture,' 'knife,' and 'a little mad.' Although the characters they play are exaggeratedly vile bandidos, the performances of these character actors were not always taken at face value by either critics or filmmakers; despite the limits and constraints of the roles, the actors' craft and the excessiveness of their caricatured characters were at least partially appreciated and understood.

Conclusion

Border Incident is a film made by liberal filmmakers which uses the border to question the policing of migration and employment practices relating to Mexican workers in the US south. Condemning the exploitation of braceros who cross into the United States without official documentation, the film portrays these workers as colonial subjects, entrapped by a corrupt American capitalist and without any chance of escape. The braceros are stuck, fixed in place with no recourse to aid. However, once Parkson and his criminal gang are defeated, the film ends with an endorsement of the use of Mexican labour when it is overseen by both Mexico and the United States

³⁹⁶ Torvay plays Miguel in *Borderline* and Bedoya plays Captain Vargas in *Border River*. Both Torvay and Moss also had important roles in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, while Moss would go on to play a key part in *Viva Zapata!*.

³⁹⁷ Rev. of *Border Incident*, *Variety*, 8; Crowther, Rev. of *Border Incident*, 29.

together. Unable to address the plight of the undocumented braceros, the movie concludes instead with a celebration of the very governmental institutions which eject the Mexicans from the country and fix them outside of citizenship.

Despite emphasising the United States' superiority in terms of technology and modernity, the film also stresses the parity between the police forces and governmental institutions of the two nations. Not only does a Mexican actor star alongside an American, but he steals the show and takes top billing. Forming a key turning point in Montalban's career, this first foray into Hollywood drama set the tone for a life that would be spent fighting for Chicano rights and opportunities within the film industry. As representations of Latin Americans in Hollywood moved away from Latin lovers and bombshells, *Border Incident* played a key role in establishing Montalban as a credible dramatic actor and in building an environment where Latin Americans could take on serious and leading roles. Perhaps resulting from PCA and good neighborly influences or Hollywood's economic imperative to appeal to Latin American markets, *Border Incident* nevertheless uses images of the US-Mexico border for political ends. The connections between the US and Mexico depicted in the film are also indicative of the changing relationship between the two countries in the Cold War. Although wartime good neighborly themes persist in the picture, the clear delineation between the countries and concern with demarcating the limits of US citizenship speaks to cold war concerns around communist infiltration and un-Americanness. The US government's need to ensure that Mexico sided with the United States and did not fall to communism in spite of its socialist and revolutionary history was paramount. *Border Incident's* conflicting emphases on the co-operation of the two countries and the differences between them seem to capture some of the complexities of the US-Mexico relationship in the Cold War.

Mobility is central to the film's representation of border crossings. The braceros are rendered immobile, trapped and eventually disappear, while Montalban's professional character can traverse the border easily, marking the beginning of a more mobile career for the actor and a political movement. While the film's narrative focuses on the regulation of border crossings and braceros, the regulatory effects of the Good Neighbor policy and the PCA may also have influenced the production. Chapter seven continues investigating this theme of regulation and examines *The Tijuana Story*, a film which similarly questions US interventions along the borderline. As in this chapter, for

The Tijuana Story, ideas of fixity and mobility are important for the film's depiction of power and regulation.

Border Cities as Contested Space: Postcolonial Resistance and *The Tijuana Story* (1957)

Throughout its history the city of Tijuana has always been profoundly influenced by the United States and in particular by the film industry. In 1915 Tijuana had just 1,000 inhabitants, but by 1960 it had become a bustling border city of over 185,000 people.³⁹⁸ American tourism to Tijuana first boomed during the 1920s and 1930s, as prohibition saw thrill-seekers flee south of the border to indulge in drinking and gambling. As the city grew in response to the rapidly increasing numbers of tourists, huge flamboyant casino and racetrack complexes were built. These resorts were frequented by Hollywood stars and featured regularly in American press. The mythic status that Tijuana has acquired in the United States has imbued the city with what Paul Vanderwood calls a ‘persistent lure’ for Americans.³⁹⁹ Vanderwood writes that:

Tijuana seems to nudge, even challenge, something quite profound in the American psyche. Crossing the border evokes a feeling of ‘freedom,’ not just raising hell and having a good time, but as *Liberty* put it, a sense of ‘playing hooky from the world’s greatest supervisor of morals – Uncle Sam.’⁴⁰⁰

Tijuana’s tourist industry prevails and the city remains a popular destination for Americans to this day, a fact perhaps deeply connected to the sense of moral abandonment Vanderwood evokes.

Tijuana has also been a frequent fixture on American movie screens since the beginning of the twentieth century. From early westerns including *The Border Raiders* (Stuart Paton, 1918) to racing tales such as *Riders Up* (Irving Cummings, 1924) and on through police dramas like *Federal Man* (Robert Tansey, 1950), Tijuana has held a

³⁹⁸ John A. Price, *Tijuana: Urbanization in a Border Culture* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 49; Paul Coates, ‘Tijuana’s Vigilantes Swing Into Action,’ *Los Angeles Mirror*, 13 April 1960. Cited by Larry Harnisch in ‘Larry Harnisch Reflects on Los Angeles History,’ *LA Times Blogs*, 13 April 2010, accessed 22 May 2013, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/thedailymirror/2010/04/paul-v-coates-confidential-file-april-13-1960.html>, n.pag.

³⁹⁹ Vanderwood, *Satan’s Playground*, 72.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

lasting appeal for Hollywood filmmakers apparently because of this sense of amorality. In his study of the relationship between Tijuana and Hollywood, Tim Girven claims that cinematic images of Tijuana produced in the 1920s and 1930s set the tone for a representation of the city as dark, seedy and dangerous that would persist throughout the century.⁴⁰¹ This chapter undertakes a close analysis of *The Tijuana Story*, a film directed by Leslie Kardos in 1957, to challenge these claims by arguing that the film contests this perceived image of Tijuana.

The tagline which featured on the film's promotional material, 'the most notorious sucker-trap in the western hemisphere,' seems something of a misdirection given the movie's themes and content. Evoking a sense of infamy and seediness, the tagline in fact accompanies a film which combines semi-documentary sequences showing the urban spaces and people of Tijuana with a narrative focused on the local community's fight against organised crime. The story centres on a Tijuana journalist, Manuel Acosta Mesa (Rodolfo Acosta) who uses his newspaper to protest the actions of a criminal gang and to make a stand to clean up the city. The gang terrorises the town, beating a schoolteacher to death for reporting the selling of drugs to children, and intimidating Acosta Mesa and his family. The violence against Acosta Mesa escalates as he refuses to stop condemning the gangsters in his editorials, eventually leading to his assassination. In the wake of his death, Acosta Mesa's son continues his work, rousing the community to pull together to defeat the criminals, and at his funeral, Tijuana turn out to pay their respects and show their support for his ideals.

In taking corruption and the dominance of a criminal cartel in a Mexican city as its subject, *The Tijuana Story* to some extent still reproduces the idea of a lawless Tijuana and a country unable to regulate its citizens or instil order and control. Notwithstanding this central thematic concern, this chapter argues that the film nevertheless also offers a different perspective on the city. By exploring the connected histories of Hollywood and Tijuana, I will argue that the American film industry is deeply implicated in the production of the city. Further, through close analysis of *The Tijuana Story*, the regulatory effects of imperialism are explored. The chapter contends that discourses of American imperialism are contested and complicated in the film through the shifting movements of the spaces of the cinematic city, as well as the political movement initiated by its inhabitants.

⁴⁰¹ Girven, 'Heterotopia,' 120.

The chapter begins with an examination of the history of the city of Tijuana and its status within American culture, drawing on secondary historical sources. Arguing that the American film industry is deeply implicated in the construction of the city and its image, the chapter understands Tijuana as a dialectic space, produced by and through interaction with the United States and Mexico. Using the postcolonial approaches of Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, I explore the ways in which colonialism is figured as an explicitly spatial phenomenon, and develop an understanding of Tijuana as a postcolonial space where American imperial influence and regulation has had physical effects on the city. The chapter continues with an analysis of some of the many cultural contexts and factors which may have impacted on the production of *The Tijuana Story*, using research from trade and fan magazines, national newspapers and secondary historical sources. In this section of the chapter I argue that although there cannot be any complete reconstruction of the multitude of influences upon the movie, its unusual place among a series of sensational exposé pictures suggests that there may have been more than just financial motivations behind the production of the film. Despite its thematic concern with corruption and crime, the movie's contemporary reception supports the idea that it enacts a social critique, as reviewers found a strong political agenda in its address. The final section of the chapter undertakes a close textual analysis of the cinematic space of *The Tijuana Story*'s city, arguing that the use of mobile, multiple viewpoints and perspectives resists any one American mythology of the city. My analysis considers the visual representation of architecture, camera angles and sense of space and depth in the frame. Narrative framing devices are also investigated, and the chapter closes by arguing that the explicit attention drawn to the American framing narrative begins to undermine it. This assertion of a different viewpoint continues through the performance of Mexican actor Acosto in the film's lead role.

The black legend of Tijuana

In 1929, a United Artists executive remarked, '[t]here is a difference between using the name Tia Juana [sic] and some other name that is not known, because it has certain connotations – it has a meaning to the audiences and brings a reaction in them.'⁴⁰² Tijuana has appeared in US film footage from at least as early as 1915, when

⁴⁰² Quoted in Girven, 'Heterotopia,' 93.

a newsreel was produced showing the opening of a new racetrack, and American filmmakers have kept returning to the city ever since.⁴⁰³ Girven has argued that it was during the period between 1924 and 1935 that Tijuana's image as vice-ridden and corrupt was cultivated. For Girven, films made about the city at this time produced this 'prototypical' US vision of Tijuana.⁴⁰⁴ He argues that these films enacted an imperialist gaze that sought to fix Tijuana as other, and which has persisted in US cinematic visions of the city ever since.

However, it was not only cinematic images of Tijuana that worked to produce the city's image. Hollywood stars and the media circulating around them also played an important role. Early Tijuanan luxury resorts such as Agua Caliente were frequented by Hollywood luminaries like Charlie Chaplin, Dolores del Rio, and Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle. The famous casino and racetrack complex Agua Caliente was also where Marguerita Cansino – later Hayworth – was first discovered as a teenage dancer. As Girven and Vanderwood have shown, images of the stars cavorting in the grand casinos and bars brought the city national attention and significance in the US. In Girven's words, it became 'a space in which the personal lives of screen idols [were] publically played out.'⁴⁰⁵ Newspapers and fan magazines featured shocking stories of stars' behaviour as they drank and gambled across the border while these activities were banned at home. In addition, scandalous celebrities such as Olive Thomas who died of a drug overdose in Paris, and Fatty Arbuckle, tried three times for manslaughter, were such frequent clients of the casinos and racetracks of Tijuana that they became inextricably associated with the place.⁴⁰⁶ These celebrity scandals became known as Tijuana bibles, the same name given to the pornographic comics often featuring famous actors which emerged around this time.⁴⁰⁷ In tandem, stars were often invoked in the marketing of Tijuana's glamorous hospitality and adverts for the resorts featured images of celebrities such as Clark Gable, Bing Crosby, Helen Twelvetrees and Jean Parker relaxing south of the border.⁴⁰⁸ Through these advertisements Tijuanan resorts were intimately linked to Hollywood glamour. Because their lives were displayed through

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁰⁴ Films about Tijuana from this period include *Riders Up*, *The Sunset Derby* (Albert Rogell, 1927), *True to the Navy* (Frank Tuttle, 1930) and *In Caliente* (Lloyd Bacon, 1935). See Girven, 'Heterotopia,' 120.

⁴⁰⁵ Girven, 'Heterotopia,' 115.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁰⁷ Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*, vol. 1 (London: Arrow, 1986), 65.

⁴⁰⁸ See reproductions of advertisements for Agua Caliente featuring Hollywood stars, top political figures and businessmen in Vanderwood, *Satan's Playground*, 31-32.

their leisure time in Tijuana, the stars' scandals and the city alike became known across the United States.

It is clear that both cinematic representations of Tijuana and the close connections between the city and Hollywood personnel worked to produce a licentious image of the place at this time. But further, as Girven has claimed, it was no coincidence that the physical growth of the city of Tijuana coincided directly with both the advent of Prohibition in the US and the rise of Hollywood filmmaking. It was during this period in the 1920s that the city first began to increase rapidly in size in response to US demand for alcohol, gambling and prostitution. The rising interconnectedness of Tijuana and Hollywood also played a major role in publicising the city and further boosting US tourism. John Price has claimed 'Tijuana was born solely of ... trade and tourism. It has no history prior to the creation of the border.'⁴⁰⁹ In this way, Tijuana can be understood as the dialectical product of interaction with the United States. Because of the significant influence of the Hollywood industry during this period of rapid growth in Tijuana, cinema is also deeply implicated in the construction of the city and its image.

The view of Tijuana that developed in the US through the 1920s and 1930s was, as Price attests, of 'a city of vice where prostitution, pornographic movies, live sex demonstrations, and drug traffic were unequalled.'⁴¹⁰ Other scholars agree that the city's reputation has played an important role in its history and its relationship with the United States. Jennifer Insley has argued that '[a]ccording to popular US discourse, the city is the ultimate symbol of Mexican lust, dishonesty, and darkness.'⁴¹¹ Whereas Diana Palaversich finds the 'leyenda negra de Tijuana' (black legend of Tijuana) to be the most persistent and pervasive discourse about the city.⁴¹² The phrase 'leyenda negra' refers specifically to the criticism of Spanish colonisation in the Americas, and subsequently to US treatment of Mexico, so by using this phrase in reference to Tijuana, Palaversich evokes the long history of struggle between the US and Mexico. Palaversich's argument also specifically foregrounds the role of US imperialism in the production of the city and its mythic status. Recalling the war between the two countries which saw the United States take control of a huge proportion of Mexico's

⁴⁰⁹ Price, *Tijuana*, 44.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴¹¹ Jennifer Insley, 'Redefining Sodom: A Latter-Day Vision of Tijuana,' *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 20 (1) (2004): 102.

⁴¹² Diana Palaversich, 'La Ciudad Que Recorro. Un *Flâneur* en Tijuana,' *Literatura Mexicana* 13 (2) (2002): 215.

territory, this American legend of Tijuana foregrounds its own colonial effects, positioning the United States' imperial actions in a continuum with those of colonial Spain. Colonialism and the critical work of postcolonialism are therefore invoked in Palaversich's emphasis on the historical roots of this American vision of Tijuana.⁴¹³

As we have seen in earlier chapters, colonialism and imperialism are explicitly spatial phenomena.⁴¹⁴ Jane Jacobs has emphasised the important role that the city often played in the regulation of colonies, attesting that 'it was in outpost cities that the spatial order of imperial imaginings was rapidly and deftly realised.'⁴¹⁵ But despite the city's role in establishing imperial power and order, the very nature of these complex, multifarious places mean that they are also spaces of contestation. Jacobs continues:

Imperialist manipulations of space never had an unchallenged surety, either in the past or the present. Precisely because cities are sites of 'meetings,' they are also places which are saturated with possibilities for the destabilisation of imperial arrangements.⁴¹⁶

Just as Tijuana was constructed through interaction with Hollywood, there also exist spaces of challenge and destabilisation both within the city and in representations of its legend. *The Tijuana Story* is one such space of resistance which challenges prevailing American visions of the city through its content and form.

Series exposés, populism and politics: production contexts

The Tijuana Story was directed by Kardos and produced by Sam Katzman in 1957. During the 1950s, producer Katzman was best known for churning out films in his infamous *Jungle* series (which earned him the nickname 'Jungle Sam'), as well as for making breakthroughs into teen movie audiences with controversial youth rebellion features *Rock Around the Clock* (Fred Sears, 1956) and *Don't Knock the Rock* (Fred Sears, 1956). Katzman is widely credited with a talent for spotting contemporary issues

⁴¹³ Following Joanne Sharp, I understand postcolonialism to be a 'critical approach to analysing colonialism and one that seeks to offer alternate accounts of the world,' as opposed to post-colonialism, a temporal and geographical term denoting countries which were formerly colonies. Joanne P. Sharp, *Geographies of Postcolonialism: Spaces of Power and Representation* (Los Angeles and London: Sage, 2009), 4.

⁴¹⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 271. See also chapters three and five of this thesis for discussions of the role of maps in colonialism.

⁴¹⁵ Jane Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

with potential for exploitation at the cinema, such as the rise of rock and roll.⁴¹⁷ As Wheeler Winston Dixon argues, during the 1950s, ‘with the exception of one or two ill-conceived projects [Katzman’s films] attracted the public’s attention and reaped substantial returns at the box office.’⁴¹⁸ Katzman was well known as one of ‘the most cost-conscious – and because of this, one of the most controversial – producers working in Hollywood in the 1950s.’⁴¹⁹ Throughout the decade he produced an average of three serials and 17 features a year. Films were often made in just six days and for budgets of less than \$100,000.⁴²⁰ The producer publicly professed his lack of interest in the artistic merit of his pictures, and in the *Life* magazine feature ‘Meet Jungle Sam,’ he declared his own ‘moviemaking philosophy’: ‘I’ll never make an Academy Award movie but I am just happy to get my achievement plaques from the bank.’⁴²¹ Despite this hard-edged money making image, Katzman is also lauded as one of the very first American independent filmmakers who, according to Dixon, granted considerable artistic freedom to directors and writers.⁴²² In addition, he made regular use of crew members blacklisted by HUAC, more so than any other producer of the time.⁴²³

The Tijuana Story was made by Katzman’s company Clover Productions for Columbia Pictures as one of a series of crime exposés set in different cities. Previous Clover Productions flicks *The Houston Story* (William Castle, 1955) and *Miami Exposé* (Fred Sears, 1956) were also based on social problems, but had a very different tone. Dramatic stories of corruption, murder and betrayal, these films threw a sensational light on violent scenarios. These films form part of what Will Straw has identified as a cycle of lurid ‘city confidential’ films, which draw upon ‘the traditions of the semi-illicit stag film, the police procedural, the semi-documentary instruction film, the vice exposé movie and the low-budget mystery.’⁴²⁴ The city confidential cycle is comprised of exposés set in various American cities, and Straw argues that the films’ ‘narratives...are secondary to their cataloguing of vice, and to the formal organization

⁴¹⁷ Yannis Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 146.

⁴¹⁸ Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Lost in the Fifties: Recovering Phantom Hollywood* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 56.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴²⁰ ‘Meet Jungle Sam,’ *Life*, 23 March 1953, 79, and Dixon, *Fifties*, 46. As a comparison, Twentieth Century-Fox spent an average of between 1.4 and 2 million dollars on films in the 1950s. See Joel Waldo Finler, *The Hollywood Story* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 49.

⁴²¹ ‘Jungle Sam,’ 82.

⁴²² Dixon, *Fifties*, 46.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴²⁴ Will Straw, ‘Urban Confidential: The Lurid City of the 1950s,’ in *The Cinematic City*, ed. David B. Clarke (London: Routledge, 1997), 110.

of these films as sequences of scenes in night-clubs, gambling dens and along neon-lit streets.⁴²⁵ Perhaps not unexpectedly then, *The Houston Story* was slammed by its contemporary reviewers as a ‘machine-made racketeer picture which lacks distinction in all departments.’⁴²⁶ However, this chapter contends that *The Tijuana Story* stands apart from Clover Productions’ other exposé flicks. Its social realist style combines narrative and aesthetic similarities to iconic left-wing film and literature, and further, its central story of morality and community positions the film as a more complex and subversive picture than many others of the city confidential cycle.

The Tijuana Story is based on real events in Tijuana in 1956 which saw local journalist Acosta Mesa murdered by a criminal cartel as he strove to clean up the city. For the first time, the film shifted the exposé series outside of the United States into a Mexican city, but in a move which stressed the interdependence of the two countries in the border region, Los Angeles newspaper reporter and television personality Paul Coates provided the film’s narration. Coates regularly wrote about Tijuana in his ‘Confidential File’ column at the *Los Angeles Mirror* and helped bring national coverage to the events surrounding Acosta Mesa’s death, stories which perhaps caught Katzman’s eye and led to the production of the film. Indeed, in his columns Coates depicts the situation in Tijuana in cinematic terms, drawing on classic iconography of westerns and Mexican bandidos. He writes that the community of vigilantes in the city ‘wear no broad sombreros, no special uniforms, no shiny badges. They pack no pistols.’⁴²⁷

Unlike the other movies in Katzman’s exposé series, *The Tijuana Story* was received as a film with clear aims and a political project. For example, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* found that ‘[t]he film is at pains to ask Americans not to judge Mexico by its border towns.’⁴²⁸ Its semi-documentary style was seen as a key feature by reviewers, with *The Hollywood Reporter* lauding its ‘pointed documentary appeal.’⁴²⁹ The Tijuanan setting was significant too, and considered to be ‘accurately staged and well lensed’.⁴³⁰ In addition, the actors’ Mexicanness was important to critics, and *The Hollywood Reporter* found ‘added interest’ in the fact that ‘Mexican players look and

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 111.

⁴²⁶ Rev. of *The Houston Story*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 23 (264): 91.

⁴²⁷ Coates, ‘Tijuana’s Vigilantes.’

⁴²⁸ Rev. of *The Tijuana Story*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 24 (276) (1957): 153.

⁴²⁹ ‘Katzman-Kardos Pic Documented Exposé,’ Rev. of *The Tijuana Story*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 9 October 1957, 3.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 3.

act like Mexicans even when portrayed by Americans'.⁴³¹ The fact that *The Tijuana Story* presented a 'true story' ostensibly guaranteed by the documentary style and the authentic Mexican voices was important for the film's contemporary reviewers, and connected to their understandings of it as a film with a specific political project. Further heightening the sense that the film was a kind of personal crusade, *Variety* reported that 'producer Sam Katzman kept this project on the shelf a couple of years because of threats from certain sinister underworld figures.'⁴³² Notwithstanding the fact that the events in Tijuana took place only a year before he made the film, the image of Katzman braving underworld threats to bring the truth to light on behalf of the Mexican townsfolk is a compelling one.

That Katzman chose this particular story for the film suggests that the plight of the community struggling to overthrow a criminal cartel caught the American public imagination at the time. As well as Coates' *LA Mirror* reports, national press such as the *New York Times* covered the shooting of Acosta Mesa and the story of his newspaper, *El Imparcial*.⁴³³ While it may be the case that *The Tijuana Story* was made in response to public interest in the story, aspects of the film which evoke specifically left-wing themes and stylings, which will be discussed in detail below, suggest that Katzman and the filmmakers also had personal and political connections to the film. Granted freedoms unavailable elsewhere in the Hollywood system, the production crew were able to pursue this unusually themed film which seems awkwardly sandwiched into the sensational exposé series. Rather than presenting titillation or sensation, *The Tijuana Story* tells a quiet and understated story of resistance.

Straw has argued that during the post-Second World War period, the semi-documentary filmmaking style was understood to have emerged from a grouping of filmmakers whose political position lay somewhere between a 'progressive coalition' and 'left-wing activism.'⁴³⁴ Such documentary film style has its origins in early travel films or travelogues, which Jeffrey Ruoff has described as 'an open form' that 'offers an alternative to both the linear cause-and-effect structure of classical Hollywood cinema and the problem-solution approach of Griersonian documentary.'⁴³⁵ Drawing on the early form of the travelogue, documentary and semi-documentary travelling films

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴³² Rev. of *The Tijuana Story*, *Variety*, 9 October 1957, 6.

⁴³³ 'Mexican Editor is Slain by Unidentified Gunmen,' *New York Times*, 28 July 1956, 35.

⁴³⁴ Straw, 'Documentary Realism,' 139; 135.

⁴³⁵ Jeffrey Ruoff, 'Introduction: The Filmic Fourth Dimension: Cinema as Audiovisual Vehicle,' in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 11.

would become a way for filmmakers to move outside of dominant Hollywood narrative frames and structures. Seen as part of this move, *The Tijuana Story* can be understood as a descendent of the travelogue. Although it participates in the appropriation of Tijuana for American audiences in the manner of a travelogue, through its semi-documentary style and, as we will see, its constant shifting of perspectives and frames, it also resists dominant Hollywood visions of Tijuana.

Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera have written of American travel writing that it is, 'like travel itself, ... constitutive, a tool of self- and national fashioning that constructs its object even as it describes it.'⁴³⁶ As a travel narrative, *The Tijuana Story* can indeed be understood as constituting the American nation while it tours the streets of Tijuana. Despite its Mexican setting, the film is preoccupied with and framed by the impact of the events on the United States. As the film jumps back and forth across the borderline, although the narrative takes care to emphasise the connections between the two countries and between Coates and Acosta Mesa as newsmen, differences are also plain. US technological superiority is highlighted through the contrasting newsrooms. Acosta Mesa works at a desk with pen and paper, whereas newspapers are mechanically produced on a massive scale at the *Los Angeles Mirror*. In this sense, *The Tijuana Story* reinforces aspects of American national identity including technological superiority and mass media production.

According to John Fousek, nationalism was vitally important to the United States during the Cold War. He argues that 'American nationalist ideology provided the principal underpinning for the broad public consensus that supported Cold War foreign policy.'⁴³⁷ Fousek contends that the Cold War was fought specifically in the name of the nation, rather than capitalism or the west, in order to win over public opinion. He continues to claim that political discourses 'linked U.S. global responsibility to anticommunism and enveloped both within a framework of American national greatness.'⁴³⁸ Although nationalism was certainly a key theme at work in US governmental rhetoric as I have argued, the war was also widely understood in terms of imperialism and colonialism. Christian Appy contends that one of the key tenets of US political discourse at this time was the idea that 'freedom was everywhere endangered

⁴³⁶ Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera, 'Introduction: New Worlds and Old Lands – the Travel Book and the Construction of American Identity,' in *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, ed. Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

⁴³⁷ Fousek, *Free World*, 2.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

by a red imperialism of unprecedented power and ambition.⁴³⁹ For Appy, the threat of Soviet colonialism meant that the United States needed to assume ‘world leadership and global responsibility – the key phrases by which American policymakers at once denied imperialism and enacted it.’⁴⁴⁰

This chapter argues that, rather than primarily working to constitute the American nation, *The Tijuana Story* instead interrogates the United States’ contradictory war on imperialism through its examination of the border town and the relationship between the US and Mexico. In *The Tijuana Story*, the United States’ imperial influence in Tijuana forms a regulatory practice, shaping and controlling the city. However, American legends are challenged and subverted through the film’s semi-documentary and travelogue style. The regulation of mobility at the border lies at the heart of *The Tijuana Story*’s narrative, and it is precisely through movement that the film’s vision of the city resists dominant American narratives of this space. The film’s more open form which operates in the style of a travelogue frees it from standard narrative storylines, and its left-wing lineage of semi-documentary filmmaking also hints at the subversive nature of the picture. *The Tijuana Story* demonstrates that despite the ‘end of ideology’ identified by critics in the 1950s, the cold war period also bore witness to diverse, and politically multifarious cultural texts which looked outside of the United States and beyond questions of nationalism to articulate their positions.⁴⁴¹

The cinematic city: destabilising spaces

This section of the chapter uses the concept of perspective in an analysis of *The Tijuana Story* to build an understanding of how its cinematic vision of the city operates. The word perspective invokes ideas of personal opinion and physical position; both the ideological and the geographical. Giuliana Bruno argues that the development of perspective in art in the fifteenth century enabled new, shifting visions that broke away from the linearity which had previously pervaded visual culture. This enabled the later development of perspectival cartographic practices such as bird’s eye view, and a mobile visual culture replete with multiple, moving viewpoints which in turn led to the emergence of the cinematic gaze. Bruno claims:

⁴³⁹ Christian Appy, ‘Introduction: Struggling for the World,’ in *Cold War Constructions*, 2.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁴¹ Bell, *Ideology*, 404-406.

Cinematic vision bears the destabilizing effect of a shifting, mobilized field. The product of the history of space, filmic space is a terrain of shifting positions – the product of multiple, incorporated, and mobile viewpoints.⁴⁴²

For Bruno, cinematic images always incorporate multiple, flexible and shifting perspectives which do not present a totalising vision, but rather a destabilising one. This multi-perspectivalism can be seen at work in *The Tijuana Story*, where, despite its thematic focus on corruption and criminality, it breaks down a hegemonic imperial account of the city and presents instead a multitude of mobile, shifting perspectives that are unfixed and detotalising.

The film opens with a documentary sequence narrated by Coates. The first image is a long shot of Tijuana's main strip, Avenida de Revolución. As Coates tells of the 12 million American visitors to the city in 1956, the view shifts to a high-angle long shot of the border crossing shown from the American side as cars stream under arches into and out of Mexico. Then in an unusually dislocating cut, the camera is suddenly positioned under one of these arches in the dark, as the cars drive through from the United States towards the screen. This edit almost violates the traditional 180 degree axis of action of classic Hollywood cinema which the rest of the movie adheres to. The shot physically transports viewers through the border, and with its dislocating jolt of unconventional editing the audience is thrown off-balance in a liminal borderline space.

The Tijuana of *The Tijuana Story* is marked by movement within its frames. Cars are always moving down the streets as tourists walk along pavements filling the frame with motion in multiple directions. The film shifts its national territory too, switching between the US and Mexico in the space of a cinematic cut.⁴⁴³ Multiple perspectives are also presented through the cinematic architecture. The opening sequence contrasts different viewpoints and angles offering a constantly moving and dislocating effect. Exterior shots of Tijuana repeat throughout the film and construct a cinematic city through which film viewers wander. The architecture of the filmic border is ephemeral as each shot fades into the next. It is always in motion as the camera moves through streets and switches from one angle to another, from long shot to close-up of the city.

⁴⁴² Bruno, *Atlas*, 178.

⁴⁴³ Similar dislocating shifts in territory took place in *Borderline*, and chapter two analyses the ways in which the cinematic cut relates to border crossing.

The concept of border architecture developed by Eloy Méndez Sáinz and Jeff Banister is useful in understanding how these spaces of Tijuana operate. They argue:

‘Transitional architecture’ is a contradiction in terms in which the natural inclination toward permanence sinks into the waters of the ephemeral... Transitions favor the meaningless, the non-place. And border cities are international ports destined to combine the various conditions of passageways, or areas of transition.⁴⁴⁴

The idea that border cities are comprised of transitional architecture and spaces which are always changing and in motion speaks in a filmic language, and likewise, *The Tijuana Story*'s city is seen from a mobile and moving multiplicity of perspectives. This cinematic city is also marked as a non-place through the camera's focus on neon signs. The clubs and bars that these signs belong to do not appear at all as the neon lights are shown in extended montages one after the other, surrounded by empty black screen. In a sequence of extremely canted shots, the camera angles change with each new neon sign, producing a jarring disconnect in the filmic space. Through this ever-moving and changing transitional space, the filmic border city becomes unstable with its diverse, conflicting and shifting perspectives. Thus, I agree with Michael Dear and Gustavo Leclerc's assertion that '[t]he principal trope in artistic, cultural, and intellectual representations of Tijuana is space.'⁴⁴⁵ However, in this cinematic representation of the city, space is rendered contradictory, changing and transitional.

The view of the city offered by *The Tijuana Story* is further destabilised through the constant shifting of its framing narratives. The film opens with an American telling of events provided by the Los Angeles reporter. Following the earlier sequence of images of Tijuana and the border crossing, a new scene shows newspapers being printed. The voiceover describing the courageous journalism of Mexican hero Acosta Mesa clearly suggests that these are his papers going to print. Yet as the camera pauses on one of the finished newspapers, it is revealed that it is Coates' paper, the *Los Angeles Mirror*. As the film's credits and title are superimposed atop the printing machines rattling off copies of the US paper, it suggests that the Tijuana story is, in fact, the story of Coates' own newspaper and journalistic career. Coates is then shown at his desk, apparently in the middle of his work, reading out headlines from *El Imparcial*, the Mexican newspaper. This initial framing device appears to offer audiences a highly

⁴⁴⁴ Eloy Méndez Sáinz and Jeff Banister, 'Transitional Architecture or Espacios de Paso y Simulacro,' *Journal of the Southwest* 45 (1-2) (2003): 167.

⁴⁴⁵ Michael Dear and Gustavo Leclerc, 'Tijuana Desenmarcada,' *Wide Angle* 20 (3) (1998): 211.

mediated view of Tijuana that is presented through the prism of the US journalist's reports.

After these introductory sequences, Coates reappears in the middle of the film, enacting a similar dislocating shift from the Mexican centre of the story in Tijuana back to the newspaper offices in Los Angeles. His voiceover bursts back into the movie to narrate a scene where Acosta Mesa reinstates his newspaper in the face of intimidation from the gangsters. Coates speaks for Acosta Mesa here, his voiceover providing the words as the Mexican journalist's soundless mouth moves on the screen. Having been immersed in the Mexican tale, audiences are suddenly pulled back to Coates' story in the US. The film's repeated and abrupt switching back and forth between the two countries draws attention to this framing device and thus begins to question Coates' perspective and position as the narrator. The film refuses to offer a unified perspective on the city, and the story resists framing by the US journalist as it highlights the artificiality of his narration.

American perspectives of Tijuana are further challenged by the performance of Acosta in the title role. A regular character actor in American films, Acosta was known for playing bad guys and bandits in movies such as *The Fugitive* (John Ford, 1947), *City of Bad Men* (Harmon Jones, 1953) and *Bandido*. *The Tijuana Story* marked his first and only title role in American cinema, and the strength of his performance was certainly not lost on the film's contemporary critics. Acosta was almost unanimously regarded as the highlight of the film, and the fact that he was presented as an authentic Mexican voice telling a Mexican story was much more significant for commentators than Coates' appearance. *Kine Weekly* found Acosta's portrayal 'powerful and sensitive,' and that the film 'frequently touches the heart'.⁴⁴⁶ For *The Hollywood Reporter*, Acosta was 'particularly impressive,' and *Variety* found his performance 'outstanding' in its 'dignity and force.'⁴⁴⁷ The fact he was a 'native Mexican' was also singled out in reviews, demonstrating the importance of a believable Mexican voice in the film, one which challenged the narration and perspective on events offered by Coates.⁴⁴⁸

As J. Brian Harley has argued, the act of mapping is never deployed without some form of political power.⁴⁴⁹ And, similarly, cinematic representations of places are

⁴⁴⁶ Rev. of *The Tijuana Story*, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 7 November 1957, 47.

⁴⁴⁷ 'Katzman-Kardos Pic,' 3; Rev. of *The Tijuana Story*, *Variety*, 6.

⁴⁴⁸ Rev. of *The Tijuana Story*, *Variety*, 6.

⁴⁴⁹ Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge and Power,' in *New Nature of Maps*, 52-81.

never devoid of political impact. Alongside its formal challenge to imperial accounts of the city, the thematic content and visual style of *The Tijuana Story* also conveys political contestations. At moments the film bears a resemblance to *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Steinbeck, 1939) and *Salt of the Earth*, both of which are renowned for their revolutionary sentiments. During one of his rousing speeches Acosta Mesa declares ‘when a decent man is hurt, I feel it.’ The line cannot help but recall Tom Joad’s final speech in *The Grapes of Wrath* in content, tone and rhythm: ‘Wherever there’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever there’s a cop beating up a guy, I’ll be there.’⁴⁵⁰ The lines given to Acosta Mesa’s publisher (Michael Fox) also echo this revolutionary and communitarian outlook. His final speech in the film, ‘Manuel was right, there is no power in the world stronger than us. Together we can clean up Tijuana, all it takes is the will,’ also makes explicit the film’s collective, socialist ethos. Roused by Acosta Mesa’s death, the community come together in an uprising against the criminals and corrupt officials running the town.

During the film’s closing funeral sequence, the stylistic influence of *Salt of the Earth* can also be felt, which, added to the similar focus on the plight of oppressed Mexican communities, draws a clear comparison between the two films. *The Tijuana Story*’s funeral procession shows Acosta Mesa’s coffin followed by his family, friends and other members of the community passing through the streets of Tijuana. Intercut with long shots of the slow-moving procession are distinctive close-ups of townsfolk, showing their faces and expressions to demonstrate their empathy with Acosta Mesa’s cause. Recalling the slow, documentary style close-ups used to show the determination and nobility of the strikers in *Salt of the Earth*, these images further lend *The Tijuana Story* a definite socialist and revolutionary ethos, presenting Tijuana as a moral and politicised community.

Conclusion

Tijuana has a long history as a cinematic city and the Hollywood film industry played a significant role in both the construction of the city and the production of its mythic status. This chapter has argued that *The Tijuana Story* is an American-made

⁴⁵⁰ John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939; repr., London: Penguin, 1992), 439. The 1940 John Ford film plays with the radical sentiments of the novel in interesting ways in relation to the New Deal. See for example, Vivian Sobchack, ‘*The Grapes of Wrath* (1940): Thematic Emphasis through Visual Style,’ *American Quarterly* 31 (5) (1979): 596-615.

film which does not perpetuate the black legend of the city constructed in and through US cinema, but rather challenges and subverts it. Although the film concentrates on crime and corruption, it also proffers an alternative view of the city with its focus on communitarian morality. While it maps out the city for its voyaging American viewers, it is not with a totalising imperialist gaze but with a more itinerant and transitional one where we are not sure on which side of the border we may be at any one time, nor which perspective of events we are presented by the film's ever-shifting narrative viewpoints. Given its direct concern with space and territory, *The Tijuana Story* and the other border crossing films from this era form cinematic landscapes where Bruno's shifting, mobilised terrain is most explicit. The transitional spaces of this cinematic city, coupled with Hollywood's complex historical connections with Tijuana raise important questions about the extent of cinema's visible, physical effects on the border.

In analysing the history of American mythologies of Tijuana, I have argued that these legends foreground their own colonial effects. As it derails such imperial visions of the city, *The Tijuana Story* opens up a multitude of other possible alternatives, suggesting that there can be no single story of Tijuana, but rather manifold shifting and competing narratives. In this way, the regulatory and restrictive nature of American imperialist visions of the city is contested. In examining the production contexts of the film it is also clear that there can be no definitive account of its influences or political persuasions. However, its striking appeal to the style and imagery of explicitly left-wing cultural texts coupled with its difference from the other films of the city confidential cycle suggest that there may have been specific political motivations behind the production. The involvement of Coates, who had long campaigned to bring light to the injustices faced by the people of Tijuana and to build support for their struggles, also supports this interpretation.

Despite the fact its thematic premise remains focused on crime and corruption, *The Tijuana Story* also presents a less sensationalised side of the city. Notwithstanding the imperial connotations of the travelogue and travel narrative, the film presents a series of different, undecidable perspectives of Tijuana which remain unstable. Like *Border Incident*, the film is concerned with both the similarities and differences between the United States and Mexico, and calls on ideas of Mexico as a communitarian culture in a positive way. Functioning as a space in which social critique of US anti-communism can be articulated, I argue that here crossing into Mexico opens up debate around community, cultural imperialism and border control.

The Tijuana Story's cinematic spaces underline the important place of the city within postcolonial work. The city forms a key site in which imperial designs are played out through the regulation of space, as witnessed in Hollywood's involvement in the production of Tijuana. However, cities are also multifarious places where total spatial control can never be realised and where opportunities for the destabilisation of imperial myths and visions are rife. The film focused on in the next and final chapter also uses a border town to explore notions of regulation but in a different way. With a contrasting vision of the cinematic border, for *Touch of Evil*, power and regulation are explicitly tied to ideas of movement and fixity. Both the shifting perspectives of *The Tijuana Story*'s border town and the entrapment of *Border Incident*'s braceros are recalled in *Touch of Evil*. Further, I will contend that power and movement are inextricably linked in the film and through this connection, complex debates around colonialism in the Cold War are brought into focus.

Chapter Eight

Imperial Journeys and Travelling Shots: Regulation, Power and Mobility in *Touch of Evil* (1958)

In a memo to Universal-International written following a screening of the studio's provisional cut of *Touch of Evil*, Orson Welles argues against the inclusion of a scene which 'sweetens' the relationship between newlyweds Susan and Mike Vargas. In the memo, Welles links the growing personal distance between the characters in the middle of the film to the international border which serves as a backdrop to the movie's action, arguing that '[t]heir separation, too, is directly the result of a sort of "border incident" in which the interests of their two native countries are in some conflict.'⁴⁵¹ The relationship between the protagonists here is figured spatially, and the border is positioned as a metaphoric divide or collision between them. The choice of language is curious, and the explicit reference to a 'border incident' cannot be ignored. It spells out a clear lineage for *Touch of Evil* that connects directly to Anthony Mann's earlier movie *Border Incident* with its similar narrative and thematic structures.

Like in *Border Incident*, *Touch of Evil*'s protagonist is a male Mexican government agent whose heroic actions solve crimes and capture criminals. In both films, the Mexican officers leave their American colleagues by the wayside as they reveal them to be ineffective or corrupt. Likewise, the two plots both feature police forces working to bring down cross-border smuggling rackets and gangsters who are not afraid to use violence to get their way. The films also look similar, both shot in black and white with lots of night-time scenes, combining fast pacing and scenes of extreme violence. *Touch of Evil* has further similarities with *Borderline* and *Wetbacks* where travelling across the border to Mexico also brings an escape from the strictures of American law, allowing US police officers to bend and play outside the rules normally governing them. Inexorably linked to Hollywood's earlier border crossings, this chapter argues that *Touch of Evil* must be seen in the context of the whole series of cold war border films, rather than as a singular Wellesian masterpiece.

⁴⁵¹ Orson Welles, 'Memo to Universal,' in Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, *This is Orson Welles*, revised ed., ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 499.

Set in the fictional border town of Los Robles, *Touch of Evil* tells the story of an investigation into a bomb that kills a prominent American construction tycoon and his girlfriend. The film opens as the bomb explodes and the investigation begins, headed by US detective Hank Quinlan (Welles) and his partner Pete Menzies (Joseph Calleia). The explosion takes place just across the American side of the international border with Mexico, and so Mexican narcotics officer Miguel/Mike Vargas (Charlton Heston) is enlisted in the investigation.⁴⁵² However, as the narrative progresses, a second investigation grows out of the first, as Vargas becomes suspicious about the integrity of Quinlan's procedures. Caught between these investigations, Vargas' new wife Susan (Janet Leigh) is drawn into events by local narcotics smugglers, the Grandi family, who align themselves with Quinlan in his attempts to use Susan to get to Vargas. In the end, Vargas' detective work reveals Quinlan's corruption, and the US District Attorney (Ray Collins) and Menzies assist him in capturing Quinlan's confession on tape.

Touch of Evil has received a phenomenal volume of critical attention, and one of the key frameworks this scholarship uses is an auteurist approach which considers the film within the context of Welles' personal talents.⁴⁵³ For example, writing in *Arts* magazine in 1958, François Truffaut exalts '[y]ou could remove Orson Welles's name from the credits and it wouldn't make any difference, because from the first shot... it's obvious that Citizen Kane is behind the camera.'⁴⁵⁴ Similarly, André Bazin argues that *Touch of Evil* forms part of Welles' continual artistic development, claiming that '[i]n its underlying thematic pattern, *Touch of Evil* can thus be seen as a masterwork of Welles despite its detective-story pretext.'⁴⁵⁵ James Naremore's analysis of the film also positions it within the context of Welles' unique personal attributes, although he also pays some attention to the film's Mexican setting. Naremore argues that 'Welles may be the only German Expressionist who is also authentically attracted to Latin cultures, and who is able to appropriate their "feel" to his style.'⁴⁵⁶ Again, attention is

⁴⁵² I use both forenames as Vargas is referred to by both his Mexican name and the Anglicised version at different moments in the film. The solidus is used to denote a sense of Vargas' ethnic fluidity which will be discussed below.

⁴⁵³ The sheer number of books on Welles' life and films attest to the persistence with which his movies are viewed as personal achievements contributing to his genius. In addition to the Bazin, Truffaut and Naremore works cited in the paragraph, see Comito's volume and any of a number of review articles written in response to the release of a new version of the movie in 1998, which is described on the 50th anniversary DVD box set as the 'definitive cut of the film...restored to Orson Welles' vision based on his detailed 58-page memo to the studio.'

⁴⁵⁴ François Truffaut, Rev. of *Touch of Evil*, trans. Leonard Mayhew, in *Touch of Evil: Orson Welles Director*, ed. Terry Comito (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1985), 229.

⁴⁵⁵ André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, trans. Jonathan Rosenbaum, foreword by François Truffaut (London: Elm Tree Books, 1978), 123.

⁴⁵⁶ James Naremore, *The Magic of Orson Welles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 205.

directed to Welles' personal attributes and his own singular 'feel' for the topics his movies address.

However, the version of *Touch of Evil* that was released in 1958 was far from a singular Welles vision. Aside from the fact that there were hundreds of personnel involved in the production of the film and contributing to its creation, Welles was pulled from the project in its final stages, and new scenes were added which were filmed under the direction of Harry Keller. Welles' subsequent intervention, in the form of the memo requesting changes to this cut quoted at the beginning of this chapter, was largely ignored by the studio. In her investigation into the continued desire among critics to attribute authorship of *Touch of Evil* solely to Welles, Brooke Rollins provocatively suggests that 'in the case of Orson Welles, our investment in authorial wholeness is inextricably linked to an investment in idealized masculine potency.'⁴⁵⁷ This chapter seeks not to repeat the mistake of searching for authorship, but rather considers the film, in its 1958 theatrical version, as a collaborative product that is constructed both by the personnel and institutions involved, and by the cultural, social and political contexts of its time. Welles' professional and political career is considered as a part of the film's broader cultural contexts, not as a means for asserting authorial authority.

Although it was celebrated upon its release by French critics such as Truffaut and Bazin, *Touch of Evil* did not immediately receive positive reviews in the US. Howard Thompson at the *New York Times* ended his review not with plaudits but with questions he found unanswered by the movie, finding that 'the lasting impression of this film is effect rather than substance.' *The Hollywood Reporter's* Jack Moffitt was most explicitly critical of the film and wrote damningly, '[s]cripted, directed and acted in by Orson Welles and played by a distinguished cast, this should have been a fine picture. But it isn't.'⁴⁵⁸ In the years since its release, and following the release of two different versions of the film,⁴⁵⁹ criticism has generally sought to recuperate and recognise the film as an important piece of work, and has covered a wide range of approaches, including psychoanalytic and feminist readings, political analyses, Chicana/o studies

⁴⁵⁷ Brooke Rollins, 'Some Kind of a Man: Orson Welles as *Touch of Evil's* Masculine Auteur,' *The Velvet Light Trap* 57 (2006): 34.

⁴⁵⁸ Howard Thompson, 'Orson Welles is Triple Threat in Thriller,' Rev. of *Touch of Evil*, *New York Times*, 22 May 1958, 25; Jack Moffitt, 'Zugsmith Depiction of Dope Ring Dizzy,' Rev. of *Touch of Evil*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 17 March 1958, 3.

⁴⁵⁹ The 50th anniversary DVD boxset includes all three versions of the film: the 1958 theatrical version, a preview version created prior to the theatrical version and discovered by Universal in 1976, and a restored version edited by Walter Murch, released in 1998 and recut according to Welles' memo.

and investigations into the film's soundscapes.⁴⁶⁰ Of most import for this chapter are the areas of scholarship which are concerned with postcolonialism, national identity and cinematic space. Used in part to outline a methodology for the study of the medium of film, Stephen Heath's influential 1975 analysis is interesting because of its particularly spatial focus. Attempting to understand the way film operates, Heath finds in the medium a 'shifting regulation,' a pattern of 'movement held and checked in the diegetic space.'⁴⁶¹ He proceeds to literally map out *Touch of Evil*, producing cartographic analyses of the filmic space around and across the US-Mexico border accompanied by maps illustrating the film's movements pictorially. In his 1985 essay Terry Comito too draws spatial conclusions from the film, understanding it to function as 'a network of incommensurable movements – whirling, without stable center.'⁴⁶² Comito is also prompted to literally map out the film, and includes his own diagram, tracing the movements of the movie through space.

The spaces of *Touch of Evil*'s border town have also come under close scrutiny from scholars. Naremore finds the film's location 'quite true to the essence of bordertowns.'⁴⁶³ Whereas Comito argues that 'Los Robles is the sinister foreign place we discover on the margins of our own world.'⁴⁶⁴ These critics' views make assumptions that border towns are dark, foreboding places, and that the film is an accurate representation of them. William Nericcio takes issue with this position, arguing that it is only a cinematic border town that is evoked by *Touch of Evil*'s location. Accusing other scholars of having 'internalized' Quinlan's views of the border and Mexico, Nericcio calls attention to the legacy of visual images of Mexico from which the film and its critics are unable to escape.⁴⁶⁵ This is an important point, and one which this chapter seeks to stress; *Touch of Evil* must be understood within the context

⁴⁶⁰ As Pease has argued, critical readings of *Touch of Evil* tend to re-interpret its contexts and bring new disciplinary knowledges to bear on it that overwrite previous analyses. Stephen Heath interpreted the film through the lens of psychoanalysis with a focus on sexuality. Later, Bhabha situated the film within the framework of postcolonialism. And subsequently Denning argued that the film's most important context is Welles' involvement with Mexican American activism. In his own analysis, Pease goes on to add yet another framework, arguing that contemporary debates around Mexican immigration to the US must be taken into consideration. See Pease, 'Borderline Justice'; Stephen Heath, 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis,' *Screen* 16 (1-2) (1975): 7-77; Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 66-79; Denning, *Cultural Front*, 362-402; Tony Grajeda, "'A Question of the Ear": Listening to *Touch of Evil*,' in *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound*, ed. Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 201-217 and Luz Calvo, "'Lemme Stay, I Want to Watch": Ambivalence in Borderlands Cinema,' in *Latino/a Popular Culture*, ed. Michelle Habell-Pallán and Mary Romero (New York and London: New York University Press, 2002), 73-81.

⁴⁶¹ Heath, 'Film and System,' 8.

⁴⁶² Terry Comito, 'Welles's Labyrinths: An Introduction to *Touch of Evil*,' in *Touch of Evil*, 9.

⁴⁶³ Naremore, *Orson Welles*, 189.

⁴⁶⁴ Comito, 'Welles's Labyrinths,' 11.

⁴⁶⁵ Nericcio, *Text]-Mex*, 62.

of other cinematic border crossings occurring at this time. Indeed, what its cinematic border evokes is precisely other such cinematic border crossings.

Homi Bhabha's analysis of the film and interrogation of Heath's work on it is particularly significant for this study because of its postcolonial focus. For Bhabha, *Touch of Evil* maps out 'discourses of American cultural colonialism and Mexican dependency,' and this understanding of its cinematic terrain informs this chapter.⁴⁶⁶ Bhabha argues that colonial discourse 'produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible. It resembles a form of narrative whereby the productivity and circulation of signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality.'⁴⁶⁷ Knowledge of the colonised thus becomes power over them, and their visibility to the coloniser leaves them powerless. This chapter will draw on Bhabha's formulation of knowledge and colonial power to investigate the connections between colonialism and regulation in *Touch of Evil*. Building on ideas of visibility and fixity, it contends that the film articulates colonialism through the regulation of mobility.

Scholars such as Michael Denning and Donald Pease rightly assert that Chicano politics and Mexican migration to the United States form important cultural contexts for *Touch of Evil*.⁴⁶⁸ The first section of this chapter argues that a preoccupation with Latin American locations and themes runs throughout Welles' body of work. As with other filmmakers considered in this thesis, representations of Latin America become politically potent images for Welles. With its travelogue form, I contend that Welles's early documentary *It's All True* constructs an imperial vision based in movement and motion which is carried through into *Touch of Evil*'s rendering of the Mexican border town. This section of the chapter argues that *Touch of Evil* must be understood within the wider context of representations of Latin America in Welles' work. The second part of the chapter moves on to examine the power of movement within *Touch of Evil*'s cinematic spaces. Building on the spatially centred analyses of the film by Heath, Comito and Nericcio, I argue that the camera itself is exemplary of a kind of movement that maps out narrative through space as it investigates and gathers knowledge. Using Bhabha's work to develop an understanding of the connections between colonialism, motion, knowledge and power, I argue that the movie's mobile vision is directly linked to *It's All True*'s travelling aesthetic. The final section of the chapter considers the regulation of movement and the role of stasis in the film. I examine Susan Vargas'

⁴⁶⁶ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 69.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 70-71.

⁴⁶⁸ Denning, *Cultural Front*, 42; Pease, 'Borderline Justice,' 87.

kidnap, arguing that the hotel and motel spaces in which her ordeal takes place play central roles in her entrapment. I then move on to interrogate the representation of Quinlan, claiming that his downfall is explicitly linked to his lack of mobility. For *Touch of Evil*, freedom of movement brings knowledge and power, whereas constricted mobility leads only to disappearance and decay.

Imperial journeys: Welles' Latin America

Touch of Evil was by no means Welles' first foray into Latin American themes and locations. His career featured repeated returns to Latin America and these backdrops form a key way in which political concerns are articulated in his work.⁴⁶⁹ Upon his initial arrival in Hollywood, Welles wrote a screenplay entitled *The Way to Santiago* which tells the story of an amnesiac stuck in Mexico with Nazi spies, and deals explicitly with anti-fascism.⁴⁷⁰ In 1938, he developed screen and radio plays of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), moving the action to Latin America and, as Denning argues, translating the tale into a 'parable of fascism' which moved 'the imperialist boundary between civilization and the jungle to a boundary between civilization and fascism.'⁴⁷¹ Following the release of *Citizen Kane* (1941), Welles worked up an unrealised screenplay called *Santa*, based on a Mexican film of the same name, in which Dolores del Rio was keen to play the lead role. The new version of the script incorporated a clear anti-fascist slant by including Nazi attempts to overthrow the Mexican government in the plot. Throughout the early 1940s, Welles also presented the *Hello Americans* radio series which brought political news stories from Latin America to US audiences. Following *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), the aborted *It's All True* and *The Stranger* (1946), his next directorial role in Hollywood was *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947). Just as Welles shifted the action in the novel *Badge of Evil* (Whit Masterson, 1956) to the Mexican border for *Touch of Evil*, *The Lady from Shanghai*'s location was similarly deliberately moved from its New York base in the novel to incorporate Mexico into the film.

In terms of the development of a political connection to Latin American landscapes, the most significant work in Welles' oeuvre is *It's All True*, an unfinished

⁴⁶⁹ Of course Welles was never far from Mexico in his personal life either through his high-profile relationships with Mexican screen stars Dolores del Rio and Rita Hayworth.

⁴⁷⁰ Denning, *Cultural Front*, 376.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 376.

documentary film produced for RKO in 1942-1943. Initially conceived as a Mercury Productions picture, the project soon attracted the attention of Nelson Rockefeller, head of the office of the CIAA, who recruited the documentary into efforts to shore up relations between the US and the rest of the Americas during the Second World War. The CIAA was concerned about Germany's growing influence in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador and Peru and, as such, its mission was 'to provide greater economic cooperation and closer cultural, scientific, and educational ties' within the continent.⁴⁷² *It's All True* was to tell a story of pan-Americanism which would unite the hemisphere together in the face of fascism and make allies of the US's southern neighbours. The version of the film that was agreed upon with Rockefeller comprised three segments; a story called 'Bonito' about a bull that is saved from the ring because of his friendship with a young Mexican boy, a section entitled 'Carnaval' which explores the origins of carnival and samba in Brazil and 'Jangadeiros,' the tale of a group of Brazilian raft fishermen or jangadeiros who successfully campaigned to secure greater rights for workers in their country.

At a governmental level, *It's All True* had obvious imperial ambitions in its aims to influence and bolster relations between the US and Latin America, something Welles was deeply and personally implicated in through both his close relationship with Rockefeller and his official role as Goodwill Ambassador to the region.⁴⁷³ But there is also a focus on social justice and socialism which runs throughout the segments of the film that is significant in terms of a more personal politicisation of Latin America in Welles' work. Marguerite Rippy has argued that *It's All True* was revolutionary in both political and formal senses. She claims that the 'nonlinear narrative ambitiously sought not only to represent but also to create a postcolonial Pan-American identity,' contending that the documentary was conceived as a new kind of film format, 'rejecting the concept of traditional authorship.'⁴⁷⁴ The footage shot for the carnival sequence held an unwavering focus on the history and evolution of samba and its relationship with the communities of Rio's favelas. Studio executives and the Brazilian government

⁴⁷² Irwin F. Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Politics in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 148. The fact that eighteen Latin American countries had banned *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Anatole Litvak, 1939) and almost all Latin American countries banned *The Great Dictator* (Charlie Chaplin, 1940), two of Hollywood's most virulently anti-fascist movies, was testament to the CIAA's perceived need to bolster relations within the hemisphere. See Adams, 'Saludos Amigos,' 290.

⁴⁷³ Catherine Benamou, *It's All True: Orson Welles' Pan-American Odyssey* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2007), 46.

⁴⁷⁴ Marguerite Rippy, *Orson Welles and the Unfinished RKO Projects: A Postmodern Perspective* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 110.

alike objected to the filming of Brazil's poor, unsightly suburbs, and particularly to the footage of black Brazilians.⁴⁷⁵

The 'Jangadeiros' segment featuring the Brazilian fishermen also has a strong socialist and revolutionary tone. The documentary recreated the true story of four fishermen, who, faced with poverty and hardship, sailed over 1,500 miles around the coast of Brazil on a raft in order to confront the president about their atrocious working conditions. Their epic journey made them famous and upon arrival they negotiated changes to social legislation with the president, improving working conditions and extending medical and death benefits to jangadeiros throughout the country.⁴⁷⁶ Denning suggests that '[t]he story of the fishermen from Fortaleza, reenacted by non-actors, is close in narrative and style to Paul Strand's left-wing documentary about Mexican fishermen, *The Wave (Redes)* (1937), and to Luchino Visconti's neo-realist tale of Sicilian fishermen, *La Terra Trema* (1948).'⁴⁷⁷

While there certainly appear to be left-wing motives at work behind the documentary in the choice of subject matter and its formal experimentation, its government-ordered imperial ambitions complicate the 'postcolonial Pan-American identity' that Rippey claims characterises its representation of the Americas.⁴⁷⁸ Although the lack of a single totalising narrative structure suggests a breakdown of traditional authorship as Rippey contends, the fact remains that the film was produced by Americans for US imperial interests. The documentary's episodic form exactly resembles that of travelogue films which Jeffrey Ruoff claims bring 'together scenes without regard for plot or narrative progression.'⁴⁷⁹ Like the travelogue, *It's All True* bears an educational impulse, aiming to inform, educate and influence communities across the continent, bringing distant lands and people home for the American public to see.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁵ Denning, *Cultural Front*, 397.

⁴⁷⁶ Benamou, *It's All True*, 37-38.

⁴⁷⁷ Denning, *Cultural Front*, 398.

⁴⁷⁸ Brady suggests that Welles chose to shoot *The Lady From Shanghai* in Mexico because it might give him opportunity to do further work on 'Bonito,' suggesting this element of the film was of particular import to Welles. Frank Brady, *Citizen Welles: A Biography of Orson Welles* (1989; repr., London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 395.

⁴⁷⁹ Ruoff, 'Introduction,' 11.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

Tom Gunning has argued that through such travelogues and travel photography '[t]ravel becomes a means of appropriating the world through images.'⁴⁸¹ In its explicit appropriation of Latin American communities intended to inform and educate US audiences, *It's All True* exhibits clear imperial practices alongside its left-wing political themes. As Gunning attests, 'the link between foreign views and colonialism needs no deconstructive analysis to be demonstrated' and is always extant.⁴⁸² Although it attempts to resist traditional narratives and authorship, *It's All True*'s story of the continent cannot be told outside of the colonial form of the travel picture. The fact that the film takes the form of a travel narrative is crucial, as the US's imperial influence in the continent is mobilised through Welles' journey around Latin America and through his camera's itinerant motion. In the carnival scenes, slow moving panoramas map the bodies of dancers in images that seem unlimited, and without borders. Gunning uses the phrase 'images without borders' to describe the panoramic and roving views offered by travelogues and their ancestral forms such as panoramas and daguerreotypes.⁴⁸³ In travelling films, he argues, '[t]he moving camera's ability to seem to surpass its own frame creates another image, which seems to pass beyond its borders.'⁴⁸⁴ Throughout *It's All True*, the roving camera rolls out such a panorama, always extending beyond the borders of the image, appropriating, controlling and consuming Latin American landscapes.

As a central and outspoken member of the political left, Welles' professional work was regularly deeply entwined with politics and his political activities. He was known to the FBI who were unable to charge him with membership of the Communist Party, but closely monitored his activities and those of his associates, many of whom were card-carrying members.⁴⁸⁵ Welles' initial forays into the entertainment world were with the Mercury Players, a socially conscious theatre group which subsequently morphed into the production company Mercury Productions. The Mercury Players sought to bring classical theatre to the people and were also closely involved with the Negro Theatre, striving to abolish racism from the stage with productions including a hugely successful Haitian *Macbeth* with an all-black cast.⁴⁸⁶ In *The Cultural Front*,

⁴⁸¹ Tom Gunning, "'The Whole World Within Reach": Travel Images Without Borders,' in *Virtual Voyages*, 27. On travel and 'touristic consciousness' see also Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴⁸² Gunning, 'The Whole World,' 30.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁸⁵ Denning, *Cultural Front*, 374.

⁴⁸⁶ John Houseman, 'The Birth of the Mercury Theatre,' *Educational Theatre Journal* 24 (1) (1972): 34.

Denning positions the Mercury group at the heart of the popular front, a ‘social movement’ born out of the 1930s Depression which he argues was formed of ‘a broad and tenuous left-wing alliance of fractions of the subaltern classes.’⁴⁸⁷ Denning hails Welles as ‘the single most important Popular Front artist in theater, radio, and film, both politically and aesthetically.’⁴⁸⁸ Alongside his Mercury work, Welles was active in a large range of political organisations including the Free World Congress, the New Theatre League, the League of American Writers, the California Labor School and the Progressive Citizens of America.⁴⁸⁹

Latin American political issues were of particular concern for Welles. He was deeply committed to Latin American civil rights movements, and in 1942 served alongside other Mercury members such as Joseph Cotton, Dorothy Comingore, Canada Lee and his then wife Rita Hayworth on the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. This Committee was formed in response to the trial of seventeen Chicano youths charged with the murder of José Díaz at Sleepy Lagoon, a popular swimming location near Los Angeles. As Peter Wollen contends, the Sleepy Lagoon case occurred at a time when Mexican-Americans were already being criminalised in the press, and the Hearst press in particular.⁴⁹⁰ Wollen attests that ‘[t]he trial and sentencing led to a new tidal wave of racist propaganda, with statements from the Sheriff’s office about the “biological disposition” of Mexicans to crime.’⁴⁹¹ Despite the Committee’s efforts to raise funds for the defence and to stem growing public antipathy toward Chicanos, the seventeen youths were found guilty. They were later acquitted in a court of appeal in 1944. Welles was closely involved in the campaign to defend and release the young men, writing the foreword to a pamphlet increasing awareness about the case, raising money and serving as spokesperson for the Committee.⁴⁹²

Both Denning and Wollen argue that the Sleepy Lagoon case forms the most important political context for *Touch of Evil*, claiming the film’s central conceit, ‘the story of the attempt to frame a young Chicano,’ as Denning describes it, comes directly from Welles’ close involvement with the case.⁴⁹³ At the time of its release, *Touch of*

⁴⁸⁷ Denning, *Cultural Front*, 5-6.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 363; 373.

⁴⁹⁰ Of course Welles already had an acrimonious relationship with the Hearst press ever since he loosely based *Citizen Kane* on the life of William Randolph Hearst. See, for example, Denning, *Cultural Front*, 386.

⁴⁹¹ Wollen, ‘Foreign Relations,’ 22.

⁴⁹² Denning, *Cultural Front*, 373.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 400; Wollen, ‘Foreign Relations,’ 23.

Evil was indeed understood by critics as a political project and as part of Welles' political development. Reviewers positioned the film within the Mercury Theatre tradition, linking it to the distinctive style and political agenda the group had forged. The *New York Times* found the 'stylized trade-marks of the director's Mercury Players unit' lay at the heart of the movie.⁴⁹⁴ For the *Motion Picture Herald*, the most distinctive feature of the film was the 'highly stylized cinema mannerisms which the Mercury Players mentor first employed in "Citizen Kane."' ⁴⁹⁵ Other reviewers criticised it as a "'Big M" of Mercury Theatre monstrosity'.⁴⁹⁶ Because of the inextricable links between the Mercury group's style and their active political agenda, implicit in the reviews' focus on the Mercury Theatre is also a recognition that the movie also had a political agenda.

Although *Touch of Evil*'s reception shows that Welles' left-wing political position was understood as an influence on the film through the associations with the Mercury group, its cultural and political contexts are broader still. Alongside Welles' personal politics and involvement in the Sleepy Lagoon case, the persistence of images of Latin America throughout his career is significant. The quasi-imperialist project *It's All True* demonstrates that the relationship between the US and Latin America could not be articulated outside of colonial frameworks, despite the left-wing and liberal politics of the filmmaker. This tension between liberalism and imperialism becomes further complicated in *Touch of Evil*, which imagines the US-Mexico relationship at a time when the American government vehemently denounced the colonial practices of its Cold War adversary the Soviet Union. Further, *Touch of Evil* must also be understood as part of the series of border films examined in this thesis which also engage with ideas of movement, stasis and the border town.

Border town in motion: movement and power

Touch of Evil represented a return to Latin America for Welles, and a return to themes and forms which were also present in his earlier works such as *It's All True*. The documentary's travelling vision is echoed and exaggerated in the camera movements of *Touch of Evil*, which traverse the border town fluidly, unhampered by the international borderline. The film's famous opening shot, filmed in a single take,

⁴⁹⁴ Thompson, 'Welles is Triple Threat,' 25.

⁴⁹⁵ J. D. Ivers, Rev. of *Touch of Evil*, *Motion Picture Herald Product Digest*, 22 March 1958, 765.

⁴⁹⁶ Moffitt, 'Dope Ring Dizzy,' 3.

moves through the spaces of the border town, following a person placing a bomb in a car boot, tailing the car as it drives off, then trailing Susan and Miguel/Mike Vargas as they walk through the border checkpoint. Shifting from a simple tracking shot showing the bomber sneaking along a wall, the camera suddenly pulls upwards into the sky, over the roofs of buildings, before sinking down again into a travelling shot which moves along streets, threading in and out of the paths of pedestrians and traffic. At times seemingly human in its motion, at others the camera's smooth flight into the air and above life on the ground renders it omniscient, a separate witness in its own right within the narrative.

Touch of Evil's camera maps its route through the border town in a very different way to that of *The Tijuana Story*. Unlike the contrasting angles and perspectives of that film which challenge any singular narrative of Tijuana, for *Touch of Evil*, the camera's motion marks out a very clear narrative trajectory in Los Robles. The camera investigates, searching for clues, drawing conclusions and directing the narrative. In the opening sequence it is constantly on the move, directly recalling Gunning's images without borders, and the sense in which the cinematic frame seems insignificant in light of an ever shifting field of vision.⁴⁹⁷ Rather than destabilised or fragmented, this imagining of a border town is total and controlling, a mobile and shifting vision which constructs the narrative of the movie through its movement. The camera's independent narration and omniscient knowledge within the film situates the border town as a colonised space; as Bhabha contends, one that is 'at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible.'⁴⁹⁸

The totalising effect of the camera becomes most explicit in a scene in which Quinlan interrogates Manelo Sanchez (Victor Millan) in his apartment. Once again in a long single take, the camera tracks around the apartment, searching for clues, moving independently of the characters and creating its own narrative. It passes by Miguel/Mike Vargas in the bathroom as he casually knocks a box off a shelf, before heading back into the living room. Later as the camera pauses to witness Sanchez's protestations, Quinlan looms into the frame, ordering Menzies to search the bedroom and bathroom. As the camera remains focused on the interrogation of Sanchez in the living room, Menzies reappears and explains how he discovered the incriminating dynamite in the very same box that the camera found empty during its sweep of the

⁴⁹⁷ Gunning, 'The Whole World,' 36.

⁴⁹⁸ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 70-71.

apartment. Through the camera's independent movement the story of Quinlan's corruption is made visible and knowable. The camera's knowledge is most often aligned with Miguel/Mike Vargas' knowledge, but through its constant disembodied movement which swirls around, over and above the action of the film, it creates a totalising narrative which fixes the border town, making it visible and knowable. As the story of an investigation, the search for knowledge is what drives the narrative forward, and it is the mobility of the camera which gives it control over the filmic space and knowledge.

Miguel/Mike Vargas is the most mobile character within the spaces of the film after the camera itself. Lean and supple, *Touch of Evil* frequently sees Vargas demonstrate his excessive physical mobility, chasing after Grandi gang members, running back and forth across the border town to check on his wife and running up stairs on foot instead of taking an elevator. Conversant in both English and Spanish, Vargas traverses the border with ease and passes from one national territory to another fluidly. As with the camera, it is through his mobility that Vargas constructs knowledge within the film. In the movie's final scenes this becomes explicit as he navigates awkward spaces and dangerous high structures with acrobatic ease in order to stay within range of Quinlan and the recording equipment. As he pauses to remove layers of clothing in this process, the bodily extent of Vargas' physical abilities is emphasised. While the two American cops walk slowly around the canal, Vargas' gymnastic motion allows him to hear Quinlan's confession and record it on tape. For *Touch of Evil*, mobility equals knowledge and power.

Vargas is also mobile in other ways. Demonstrating the fluid understandings of ethnicity within Hollywood at this time, Heston is made up to pass as the Mexican officer through make-up, performance and language. Yet his all-American star persona colours the character of Miguel/Mike Vargas throughout the film. In 1950s Hollywood, ethnicity remained something that was understood as performable and unfixed, but as discussed in chapter two, full flexibility in terms of the ethnicity of roles was usually only granted to white actors. Only a closed range of ethnic roles were open to actors of other backgrounds and they rarely played white American characters. Therefore the extent of ethnic fluidity and power within the narrative that Heston enjoys comes from the fact he is a white American playing a Mexican, while Mexican actors do not play

American characters in the story.⁴⁹⁹ Also combining American and Mexican signifiers in his dual name, Miguel/Mike holds power through this hybridity and fluidity.

Vargas' fluid ethnic identity is highlighted from the very beginning of the film, when Quinlan refers to him as 'some kind of Mexican.' His subsequent accusation, 'he doesn't sound like a Mexican' explicitly highlights Heston's awkward Spanish accent. In his deconstructive analysis of the film, Nericcio finds its representation of Mexico and Mexicans to be contradictory: 'one can find and document how Welles's *Touch of Evil* reinforces predictable stereotypes of the *mexicano* subjectivity and of the Anglo subjectivity. Closer scrutiny reveals, however, that these expressionistic archetypes are mined with nuances of difference, which derail the archetype.'⁵⁰⁰ This is also true of Vargas specifically. Although the character is an active, capable and professional Mexican and the clear hero of the story, he remains an American actor performing ethnicity, and it is the power of this position that allows him to solve the crime and save his wife; Heston takes the starring role, not Vargas. Publicity articles in the film's press kit emphasise this idea, stating that Heston plays an 'unusual role' and appears as 'an unfamiliar Heston with dark hair and moustache.'⁵⁰¹

The character of Tana (Marlene Dietrich) also enjoys some considerable fluidity and power in *Touch of Evil*'s narrative. Like Vargas, but to a lesser extent, her ethnicity is mobile, seeing the German actor play the ethnically ambiguous owner of a pianola bar on the border town's main strip.⁵⁰² As Jill Leeper has noted, Dietrich's performance here is something of a pastiche of her previous Hollywood roles.⁵⁰³ Indeed, explicitly so, as according to Frank Brady, Dietrich put together her costume for *Touch of Evil* from clothes and accessories worn throughout her Hollywood career. Brady reports '[h]er black wig came from Paramount, where she had done *Golden Earrings*, her spangled shoes came from her role in *Rancho Notorious* [another border film] at RKO, and from Warner Brothers she took a blouse that she had worn in *Stage Fright*.'⁵⁰⁴ Dietrich's costume becomes a cinematic palimpsest within *Touch of Evil*, presenting a

⁴⁹⁹ See also Mercedes McCambridge's performance as a Mexican member of the Grandi gang. Joseph Calleia of Maltese origins does play an American cop however, demonstrating the easy assimilation of western European immigrants in the US.

⁵⁰⁰ Nericcio, *Text[Mex]*, 78.

⁵⁰¹ *Touch of Evil* press pack, British Film Institute National Archive, 1958, n.pag.

⁵⁰² Her name too is unfixable and shifting, with uncertainty in reviews and scholarship on the film that use 'Tana' and 'Tanya' interchangeably. According to the American Film Institute Catalogue entry for the film, the name used in the film is Tana. Accessed 22 May 2013, <http://afi.chadwyck.co.uk/home>.

⁵⁰³ Jill Leeper, 'Crossing Musical Borders: The Soundtrack for *Touch of Evil*,' in *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, ed. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 236.

⁵⁰⁴ Brady, *Citizen Welles*, 502.

shifting multitude of different characters which cannot be pinned down. Through Tana's fluidity, she also holds knowledge of events in the town; she is a fortune teller and correctly predicts that Quinlan's future is 'all used up'.

The characters that possess power and knowledge in *Touch of Evil* are those that have the most movement and motion. Vargas is the most physically and ethnically mobile character, travelling furthest and undertaking athletic feats of mobility while fluidly able to traverse both sides of the border. Through its free movement the camera too is able to map out the film's narrative, investigating and uncovering clues and plotting the course of the story as it travels. This conflation of knowledge, power and mobility connects *Touch of Evil* back to *It's All True* and travelogue filmmaking. The characters exercising the most power within this border town are American not Mexican, and as the camera maps out a narrative through its movements, the town and its other inhabitants are revealed, fixed and possessed for American audiences.

Static subjects: regulation and mobility

In contrast to the powerful actors within the film who possess movement and fluidity, those rendered powerless are static and trapped within the cinematic space. Disappearance and entrapment narratives are repeated time and again in border films. This stasis becomes the articulation of difference at the border, as Bhabha argues, '[f]ixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.'⁵⁰⁵ Through narratives which regulate movement, colonial dominance is reiterated while the undesirability of the other is rendered visible. This apparatus is clearly seen at work in *Border Incident*, where the undocumented braceros are trapped outside of US society and literally disappear into the borderlands. In *Touch of Evil*, Miguel/Mike Vargas and the roving camera track and fix the border town into place. Outside of clear national territory, Los Robles falls off the map, a place of entrapment which swallows up immobile inhabitants.

The physical spaces of *Touch of Evil* resist any clear national categorisation. Originally the film was scheduled to be shot in Tijuana, but the Mexican government

⁵⁰⁵ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 66.

refused permission because of censorial issues as well as the fact they did not want the film to perpetuate a ‘scrubby’ image of the city.⁵⁰⁶ Venice, California was chosen as a good alternative because of its decaying opulence and grand canal.⁵⁰⁷ The border town set closely resembles Tijuana and images from *The Tijuana Story*; arched buildings line the main strip which is busy and bustling with signs advertising bars, hotels and clubs filling the screen. As I have previously discussed, the arch is an iconic architectural symbol of Mexicanness and is deployed in most of the films in this thesis. In *Touch of Evil*, the arches take on a significant role in the filmic space as members of the Grandi gang lurk behind them, preparing to accost Susan Vargas. These covered arched corridors become sinister and dangerous because of their Mexicanness.

Despite all of these signs and symbols identifying the filmic space as a borderline location, the film also flaunts the unmistakably American features of its landscape. Most obviously out of place within a border film are the oil derricks, an iconic feature of the southern American landscape, which appear throughout the film. As the bomb explodes and chaos ensues around Linnekar’s burning car, the scaffolding of the derricks is present in the background, enclosing the scene in a ring of tall dark structures with pumps slowly moving up and down. Later, as Miguel/Mike Vargas and American District Attorney Schwartz drive to Quinlan’s farm, a long shot reveals low-rise housing that is densely interlaced with oil pumps and machinery. As the narrative crosses back and forth over the border, the diegetic space is rendered more unstable and in-between. Not only does the film frequently lack clear signals as to which side of the border its locations are, the cinematic terrain too falls between this fictional border town and the heart of California’s oil fields.

Susan Vargas is swallowed up into the story of the film as she is trapped by the Grandi gang, drugged and framed for murder. It is no coincidence that the harassment she endures is enacted in two hotels and a motel. In their introduction to the volume *Moving Pictures/Stopping Places*, David B. Clarke, Valerie Crawford Pfannhauser and Marcus A. Doel define hotels, motels and hostels as ‘stopping places,’ which are characterised by their status as spaces ‘between belonging and being out of place.’⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ Welles, *Orson Welles*, 310.

⁵⁰⁷ Brady claims that this choice of location was suggested to Welles by Aldous Huxley. Brady, *Citizen Welles*, 501.

⁵⁰⁸ David B. Clarke, Valerie Crawford Pfannhauser, and Marcus A. Doel, ‘Checking In,’ in *Moving Pictures/Stopping Places: Hotels and Motels on Film*, ed. David B. Clarke, Valerie Crawford Pfannhauser, and Marcus A. Doel (Lanham and Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 1. On the wider

As locations which are somehow out of place and disconnected, *Touch of Evil*'s hotels are off the map just like the town itself; Susan Vargas is unable to reach out for help and no one comes to her rescue. Despite frequent discussions and telephone conversations with Miguel/Mike, she is prevented from explaining to him the unwanted attentions she has been receiving. Even after waking up, undressed and drugged with Joe Grandi's bulbous head leering over her, when she screams for help from a balcony, Miguel/Mike is unable to hear and drives straight past.

Susan's entrapment is also indicated spatially as the Grandi gang begin their assault on her in the motel. The camera closes in on her face as dark figures circle around, filling the frame as her body becomes consumed within their shadows. Jann Matlock has argued that the Vargas' 'need to sleep in hotels' forms a 'kind of allegory for their inability to find a place where they belong.'⁵⁰⁹ However, it is only Susan Vargas who actually spends any time in these 'unhomely' spaces, while Mike Vargas seems quite at home actively pursuing the police investigation and traversing both sides of the border.⁵¹⁰ In contrast, Susan is the one who remains out of place and unbelonging. Consigned to her hotel and motel rooms, she occupies a space outside of American society without any recourse to help, which recalls the kind of position held by the undocumented bracero workers in the US in *Border Incident*.

The other key static character in the narrative is Quinlan, whose movements become more and more restricted over the course of the film as he loses knowledge and power. For Quinlan, stasis leads to decay and ultimately to his demise, and this process is played out most obviously on his body. His corpulence is constantly emphasised through low angle shots which highlight his weight as he moves slowly and painfully, leaning on his stick for support. The cigars, candy and hooch which he is constantly consuming also attest to the corruption of his body as well as his actions. The film's press pamphlet capitalises on the sheer hideousness of his decaying body, describing the character as 'a grotesque, bloated figure, dragging his game leg like a great, wounded toad.'⁵¹¹ In the film's final scenes, Quinlan's body is at its most corrupt, mirroring his

relationship between the hotel and the city see Donald McNeil, 'The Hotel and the City,' *Progress in Human Geography* 32 (3) (2008): 383-398.

⁵⁰⁹ Jann Matlock, 'Vacancies: Hotels, Reception Desks and Identity in American Cinema, 1929-1964,' in *Moving Pictures/Stopping Places*, 117.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵¹¹ The press kit makes a selling-point of Welles' transformation for the role, with publicity stories explaining that the 'false stomach and hump on his back [give] the character more than one-fourth again the weight Orson carries in real life.' Another publicity piece entitled 'Welles - "My Weightiest Role"' muses that 'on anyone else, the false nose and the padding necessary for the part would be merely absurd.'

final betrayal of Menzies. During this altercation, sweat drips from his flabby face and spit flies across the screen. Quinlan is leaking, putrefying, and sure enough his body is finally dumped in the canal to fester in the rancid water.

Concerns over obesity and weight problems emerged as a major health concern in the US during the 1950s. Reports from as early as 1952 cite obesity as the foremost nutritional problem in the country, affecting up to a quarter of adults.⁵¹² A government committee on aging problems found that citizens were ‘eating their way into the grave,’ and press reporting around obesity highlighted the connections between the disease and death, claiming ‘[o]besity is striking [people] down, impairing their productivity, restricting their enjoyment of life and killing them before their time’.⁵¹³ Not only connecting Quinlan to his impending death, in the film his excessive obesity also invokes restriction, immobility and impairment. It is exactly this decline in his ability to move around and command the filmic space that eventually sees his demise.

Like Quinlan, the whole border town is strikingly marked by decay throughout the film. The walls of buildings are covered with layer upon layer of advertisements, all partially stripped back and torn, creating a visual palimpsest of rotting posters, none of which are legible. The streets of the town are strewn with litter that floats across the screen in nearly every shot, and the canal which features in film’s final scenes is a landscape of detritus. This waterway is filled with tyres, oil drums, broken beds, mouldering mattresses, crumbling couches, torn clothing and waste paper. After he shoots Menzies, Quinlan momentarily takes a seat on a decomposing arm chair. The rotten throne speaks to his stasis and powerlessness; his immobility leads to his lack of knowledge and ultimate defeat. In this border town, those who can easily traverse the boundary pass through safely, but those without such freedom of movement become trapped.

The fact that *Touch of Evil*’s decaying spaces are filled with the rotting products of American consumer culture is significant. As a period of high consumption, the 1950s saw huge increases in advertising and spending, with economic growth of 200 per cent per capita between 1947 and 1956.⁵¹⁴ According to Randall Bennett Woods, during the 1950s ‘consumption became a virtual obsession,’ with home ownership

⁵¹² Bess Furman, ‘Obesity is Termed No. 1 Nutritional Ill,’ *New York Times*, 9 December 1952, 45.

⁵¹³ ‘Obesity Peril Stressed,’ *New York Times*, 27 February 1953, 25.

⁵¹⁴ Randall Bennett Woods, *Quest For Identity: America Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 126.

increasing by 50 per cent between 1945 and 1960, and car ownership at almost 100 per cent by the end of the decade. Woods explains that '[s]pending on advertising increased 400% and almost tripled the amount spent on education.'⁵¹⁵ In this period, American culture was changing from one which denounced waste as 'immoral' to one in which 'planned obsolescence' was normal.⁵¹⁶

The consumer revolution of the 1950s was hailed as a great American success. Published in 1958, Louis O. Keslo and Mortimer J. Adler's *The Capitalist Manifesto* argues that '[i]t is our industrial power and capital wealth, together with our institutions of political liberty and justice, that make America the place where the capitalist revolution must first take place.'⁵¹⁷ Another report describes the US as 'uniquely dynamic [with] the highest standards of living closest to a democratic, classless society [which] has come about through a fantastic increase in productivity made possible through greater mechanization.'⁵¹⁸ The celebratory tone of these edicts is not matched in the appearance of the products and advertisements which populate *Touch of Evil*'s border town. Hoardings and posters are decomposing, ripped and torn, while all manner of household items lie discarded in the filthy canal at the end of the movie. The border town is out of place, a space neither of the US nor Mexico, unstable in its shifting national terrain but trapped and entrapping at the same time. Lacking a clear national location, Los Robles is a non-space, frozen in time and decaying. Like its hotels, the 'unhomeliness' of the town is such that ordinary household objects become grotesque and rotten.⁵¹⁹ Quinlan's armchair in the canal becomes the ultimate symbol of unhomeliness, stasis and decay.

Conclusion

As it ends, *Touch of Evil* may resolve its two investigations but many questions remain unanswered. Both a corrupt cop and a good cop end up dead, and the man framed by Quinlan for murder apparently also confesses to the crime. Vargas' leading role seems to present a positive Mexican hero but his awkward accent and obvious makeup is a constant reminder that this Mexican is played by an American movie star.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁵¹⁷ Louis O. Keslo and Mortimer J. Adler, *The Capitalist Manifesto* (New York: Random House, 1958), 4.

⁵¹⁸ 'People's Capitalism,' *New York Times*. 11 June 1957, 34.

⁵¹⁹ See Matlock, 'Vacancies,' 117, for a discussion of homeliness and unhomeliness in relation to hotels and motels.

Touch of Evil presents a profound lack of clarity over who is in control, and who has moral authority, alongside the constant ambiguities in its national territory. This chapter has sought to track these issues of regulation through the film following the dual axes of movement and stasis. Crucial in representations of the border, movement enables characters to cross boundaries freely and easily, to tour and travel and to have experiences which constitute identity. Conversely, stasis leads to a loss of identity, to disappearance, decay and death. Where characters are unable to traverse the border, they remain stuck, outside of national belonging and eventually disappear.

In *Touch of Evil*, the most freedom of movement is granted to Miguel/Mike Vargas, the ethnically mobile and athletically itinerant hero. In contrast Quinlan, the corrupt villain of the piece, descends steadily into fixity as his corpulence prevents him moving easily and his body begins to putrefy and decay. The filmic space is regulated, mapped and controlled by the film's ever moving camera as it charts the course of the narrative. In this dramatisation of the way in which movement and control of space is connected to knowledge and power, *Touch of Evil* directly recalls cinema's travelling heritage and the prolific early form of the travelogue. With its roving, mobile camera, space is controlled and mapped, an image without borders that encompasses and lays claim to that which it surveys. The camera's journeys back and forth across and around the border present the border town spaces for possession by film viewers, just as the travelling shots of *It's All True* sought to reveal the landscapes of Mexico and Brazil.

Like the camera, Miguel/Mike Vargas occupies a position of power in the narrative. Through his mobility he gains knowledge; because he is conversant in both languages he can speak to Sanchez in Spanish to learn his side of the story and also consult papers in the American records office to reveal Quinlan's crimes. But this is a possessing, colonising power which fixes and regulates in the same manner as the camera movements. Vargas may be free to traverse the border zone, but only at the cost of others who are trapped and disappeared. There is no clear moral outcome in the film, and in this way it begins to evoke the kind of ambiguous and uncertain position discourses of colonialism occupied in the US at this time. Through its interrogation of regulation at the border, *Touch of Evil* sets in motion the tensions around the United States' role in the world in the cold war period.

Although its representation of the border town and Mexico cannot escape the camera and Vargas' imperialist vision, the film presents the US and Mexico as equally

implicated in corruption and crime. The undecidability of Los Robles' national terrain is suggestive of a division between the two countries that is entirely symbolic and insignificant. Unable to escape the imperialist edge of US architectures of pan-American co-operation, *Touch of Evil* nevertheless offers a cold war vision of the United States and Mexico as equals and as equally responsible for tackling crime and corruption enacted by individuals and institutions alike. Understood as part of a cycle of 1950s border films rather than an isolated Wellesian masterpiece, *Touch of Evil*'s narratives of mobility and staticity concur with the key concerns of these movies. Dramatising the country's border and relationship with Mexico, these films examine the United States' place in the world and in cold war struggles. Debates around US intervention and Soviet expansion are played out in discourses of colonialism which pervade the films' concern with the regulation of the border.

Conclusion

I press my hand to the steel curtain –
chainlink fence crowned with rolled barbed wire –
rippling from the sea where Tijuana touches San Diego
unrolling over mountains
and plains
and deserts,
this ‘Tortilla Curtain’ turning into *el río Grande*
flowing down to the flatlands
of the Magic Valley of South Texas
its mouth emptying into the Gulf.⁵²⁰

Borderlands cinema and Chicana/o studies

While this thesis focuses on the period 1949-1958 and what has been termed the peak cold war period, the US-Mexico border has been an important cinematic location since the earliest days of cinema and continues to feature regularly in films today. In centring on a specific historical timeframe, I have sought to construct a cultural history of the border in the United States in the peak cold war period and to understand what cinematic images of the international boundary may have meant at this time. Academic interest in representations of the border has risen sharply since the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa’s 1987 work *Borderlands/La Frontera* and the burgeoning of Chicana/o studies. This area of scholarly work is concerned with the position of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Latin Americans and people of Latin American origin in the United States. It theorises and establishes ‘the formation of hybrid cultures and identities that complicate dominant US notions of citizenship.’⁵²¹

The US-Mexico border plays an important role in this project. For Anzaldúa, the boundary becomes a ‘1,950 mile-long open wound / dividing a *pueblo*, a culture, / running down the length of my body, / staking fence rods in my flesh’.⁵²² Articulating her project in geographic terms it is, in the ‘*herida abierta* [open wound]’ of the border that Anzaldúa imagines ‘the lifeblood of two countries merging to form a third country

⁵²⁰ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 2.

⁵²¹ Claudia Sadowski-Smith, *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 27.

⁵²² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 2.

– a border culture.⁵²³ Claudia Sadowski-Smith argues that Anzaldúa's work uses divisions of race, gender and sexuality to construct a hybrid identity and a Chicana subjectivity: 'To theorize a space in which these divisions can be overcome, *Borderlands/La Frontera* forges the now famous notion of a mestiza borderlands consciousness.'⁵²⁴ This hybrid *mestiza* consciousness is figured spatially, evoked through Anzaldúa's third border country, but also through other theorists' invocation of the territory of Atzlán, mythic 'homeland' of Chicanas and Chicanos.⁵²⁵ Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram-Dernersesian explain the importance of Atzlán for Chicano and subsequently Chicana/o studies: 'Chicano identity was framed in Aztlán. And, Aztlán provided a basis for a return to the roots, for a return to an identity before domination and subjugation – a voyage back to pre-Colombian times.'⁵²⁶

Alejandro Lugo concurs that the international boundary is theoretically crucial for Chicana/o scholarship, contending that 'the border region, as well as border theory and analysis, can erode the hegemony of the privileged center by denationalizing and deterritorializing the nation-state and culture theory.'⁵²⁷ Equally, for Chabram-Dernersesian, the borderlands become a crucial 'resource for addressing a colonial condition in a supposedly postcolonial world'⁵²⁸ The spatial emphases in Chicana/o figurations of identity, homelands and theory thus make it an important framework for analysing United States and Mexican culture in the borderlands and beyond in the future. Fregoso's *The Bronze Screen* and collections *Chicano Cinema* (edited by Gary Keller) and *Chicanos and Film* (edited by Chon Noriega) provide insightful analyses of the growth of Chicano and Chicana cinema.⁵²⁹ Chicana/o studies has also turned its attention specifically to the representation of the US-Mexico border in recent American and Mexican cinema, for example in Lysa Rivera's provocative work on science fiction literature and film in the borderlands.⁵³⁰

Investigating the geographies of Chicana/o identities in recent cinematic depictions of the borderlands is an important area of work for the future. So too will be

⁵²³ Ibid., 3.

⁵²⁴ Sadowski-Smith, *Border Fictions*, 28-29.

⁵²⁵ Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, 'Chicana/o Cultural Representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourses,' in *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader*, 27.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁵²⁷ Lugo, *Fragmented Lives*, 214.

⁵²⁸ Chabram-Dernersesian, 'Introduction: Locating Chicana/o Cultural studies: Contentious Dialogues and Alternative Legacies,' in *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader*, 7.

⁵²⁹ Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen*; Gary Keller, ed., *Chicano Cinema: Research, Reviews and Resources* (Tempe: Bilingual Review/Press, 1993); Noriega, *Chicanos and Film*.

⁵³⁰ Lysa Rivera, 'Future Histories and Cyborg Labor: Reading Borderlands Science Fiction after NAFTA,' *Science Fiction Studies* 39 (3) (2012): 415-436.

work on Latin American and mestizo identities, Chicana feminism and issues of class, which have often been overlooked in studies of Hollywood cinema. While these critical approaches have informed and provided frameworks for my analyses of the films in this thesis, because of the historical nature of the study, I have been more focused on attempting to reconstruct what Hollywood films featuring the US-Mexico border of the 1950s can tell us about this period in history. Because of limitations of space, I have been unable to consider the dialogue between American and Mexican cinema and the many fascinating Mexican border films produced during the mid-twentieth century and beyond. Future research could fruitfully explore representations of the border in American, Mexican and pan-American productions. For instance, the vision of the border and its relationship to the migrant experience offered in the Mexican movie *Espaldas Mojadas* [Wetbacks] (Alejandro Galindo, 1953) is strikingly different than that presented in the American movies of the same period. *Espaldas Mojadas* was not released in the United States until two years after it was made because censors initially decided its treatment of the theme of undocumented migration and emphasis on the hardships faced by Mexicans was inappropriate for American audiences, an intriguing starting point for research in this area.⁵³¹

Travelling across the border: reflections and conclusions

In the first part of the thesis I asserted that one of the key ways in which border crossing was presented during the Cold War was as a romantic pursuit, where Mexican backdrops are romanticised and exoticised to accompany on-screen romances between American travellers. The first chapter analysed *Where Danger Lives* as an example of a wider body of films which see Americans try to escape the United States by heading south of the border. The romance of Mexico pervades the film's entire narrative and draws the story and the characters steadily towards the border, where they imagine beginning a new life together. This chapter investigated the history of American tourism to Mexico, finding that the 1950s saw a huge surge in travellers to the country as new roads were constructed and automobile ownership ballooned in the United States. Echoing this tourist trend, *Where Danger Lives* privileges automobile travel, and the film emphasises the movement of the car and explicitly associates its characters with a travelling identity which is denied to the borderlands towns and people they meet on

⁵³¹ García Riera, *México Visto* 3, 64.

their journey. As a way of understanding the interactions of the American tourists with the sites and sights they encounter, I therefore posited an alternative to John Urry's 'tourist gaze.'⁵³² Through analysing *Where Danger Lives*, I theorised instead a cinematic tourist mobility which sees tourists moving, tracking and mapping the places and people they encounter, while these sites and sights are made static and fixed into place, denied movement in all senses.

The second chapter continued to explore Mexico as a romanticised space, and focused on the act of border crossing and representations of identity and ethnicity in *Borderline*. Moments of border crossing in the film were closely analysed, and I contended that the border seemed to resist representation through cinematic cuts and absence. Following this argument, the chapter investigated the history of representations of the borderline, including in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which sought to map out the boundary in writing. Given the textuality of this treaty and its contingency on other documents, the chapter contended that over-wrought efforts to represent the US-Mexico border call attention to the fact that there is no real world referent to be depicted. The similarly unstable representation of the border in *Borderline* hints at the fact that without the artificial line there would be no way to differentiate the national territories of the borderlands. Crossing the border into Mexico enables the film's American protagonists to playfully explore multiple and flexible identities as their romance develops, and I argued that these layers of disguise and masquerade are connected to the practice of passing in Hollywood. During this period, actors regularly performed different ethnicities in films, but while the whole range of ethnicities were open to white American actors, players of different backgrounds were often restricted to other 'ethnic' roles. This understanding of ethnic performance enacted a flattening of difference into a melting pot where ethnicity was conceived as something performable, flexible and indeterminate. As in chapter one, *Borderline* presents a sharp contrast between its mobile, roving Americans and the static and immobile Mexican people and landscapes they encounter.

The third chapter completed part one with a study of *Wetbacks* and the exoticism of Mexico. The fact that the movie was filmed on a tropical island is foregrounded in its publicity, and its backdrops of sun, sea and sand, filmed in luminous Eastman Color present an exotic locale. I investigated the representation of Mexican tourist resorts in the American media, arguing that the country was constructed as the United States' own

⁵³² Urry, *Tourist Gaze*, 2.

convenient and affordable tropical getaway. In analysing the exoticism of Mexico in the film, I used Homi Bhabha's postcolonial work to argue that this American imagining fixes and silences Mexico, overwriting its terrain with a denationalised tropical vision. In *Wetbacks*, *Where Danger Lives* and *Borderline*, the overwriting of Mexico with romanticised American visions presents American characters as mobile and modern while their Mexican counterparts are static, primitive and fixed into place. The relationship between the two countries is depicted as an imperial one in these films, and they suggest that rather than being concerned with any contemporary border policy or developments in migration, the representation of the US-Mexico border taps into wider debates about the United States' place in the cold war world.

Throughout the first three chapters of the thesis cold war discourses were investigated. I argued that colonialism was central to cold war rhetoric and that imperialism formed an important strand of the United States' international policy at this time. Colonialism was a conflicted and contradictory concept in the Cold War and was used across the political spectrum to articulate many different positions and opinions on American cold war policy. The government itself also contributed to these contradictory understandings through concurrently condemning Soviet Union actions in explicitly colonialist terms, while intervening and exercising imperialist policies themselves. While the government described the spread of communism under the Soviet Union as colonial, communists, leftists and liberals found American actions to secure the support of Latin America and other newly independent countries to be colonial themselves. The terms of debate between communists, capitalists and everyone between were therefore shared and used to articulate a whole variety of stances, in the same way that I have argued images of Mexico operate in these border films.

The second part of the thesis began with an analysis of *Vera Cruz* in chapter four. Focusing on border crossing in relation to ideas of revolution, *Vera Cruz* and *Border River* are just two examples from a wide range of Hollywood films which have depicted Mexican revolution across the twentieth century. Chapter four argued that *Vera Cruz* does not exhibit the kind of frontier mythology that Richard Slotkin has contended pervades representations of the American west and westerns. Rather, questions of colonialism pervade the film and are made extant through the cinematic celebration of Mexico's heritage and ancient landscapes and the questioning of French and American imperial claims on the country's territory. Mexican revolutionaries are presented as noble and honourable people in the film, and their communitarian way of

life is pitted against the individualist motivations of the American travellers. As the American hero is won around to the revolutionary cause, questions of value become central. The final shootout sees money and morals squared against each other, and individualism rejected.

The next chapter continued my investigation into border crossing in the western genre with its focus on *Border River*. With a narrative which explicitly tackles the colonisation of territory, the film cannot help but recall the colonisation and subsequent seizure and redistribution of Mexican land by foreign countries during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. As with *Vera Cruz*, this chapter argued that frontier mythology cannot account for *Border River*'s complex concern with territory and colonialism. Rather than featuring the wide open vistas and expansiveness of the frontier, *Border River*'s cinematic landscape is closed and enclosing. In the same way, these enclosing effects are played out through the lead female character in the film as the dictator of the separatist zone attempts to control her. And yet, despite the mapping and binding of her body within the film's closed landscapes, she becomes politically active and self-determining within the narrative. As in *Vera Cruz*, Mexican landscapes are equated with politicisation and revolution. By analysing *Border River* and *Vera Cruz* outside of the context of the western genre and instead focusing on their cinematic locations, this part of the thesis asserted that the films do not relate to their historical and political contexts through genre, but rather, in spite of it.

Part three of the thesis focused on ideas of regulation and border crossing. Chapter six centred on *Border Incident*, a film about the plight of Mexican migrants in the United States. Again, the US-Mexico border is mobilised to tell a political story, and here the exploitation of undocumented Mexican labourers is condemned. Portrayed as colonial subjects, the Mexicans are trapped without recourse to aid or chance of escape. I argued that the film is careful to draw comparisons between the American and Mexican police officers who work to catch the criminals exploiting the Mexican workers. Not only is the Mexican officer equally capable and professional, but the actor Ricardo Montalban steals the show, taking top billing for the film. I contended that *Border Incident* marked an important turning point in Montalban's career, helping to establish him as a serious dramatic actor and laying the ground for his work in the Chicano civil rights movement. Concerned with the policing and regulation of the borderline, *Border Incident*'s production was also subject to regulation, and the chapter also explored the relationship between the filmmakers and Hollywood's censorship body the PCA,

arguing that the film demonstrates the legacy of the Good Neighbor period in US history as well as a personal political engagement with issues of American imperialism by the filmmakers.

Chapter seven continued the investigation into regulation and movement as a cinematic theme and political context for filmmaking with its analysis of *The Tijuana Story*. By exploring the interconnected histories of Tijuana and Hollywood, the chapter argued that American cinema played a central role in shaping the city and in constructing the black legend of Tijuana that perceives it as a dark and seedy place. I contended that *The Tijuana Story* presents a vision that challenges and subverts this mythology through its moral tale centred on community and communal actions, and its fragmented, destabilising cinematic landscape. In its engagement with Tijuana's terrain, the film foregrounds the importance of the city in postcolonial work. Despite being constructed in and through the United States' influence, Tijuana, as a city, is always moving and mobile, a multifarious space where spatial control can never be total and there are always opportunities for subversion. With stylistic appeals to left-wing cultural texts, *The Tijuana Story* is a film about the regulation of a border city which suggests that there is no one single story of the place. The chapter tracked the political backgrounds of *The Tijuana Story*'s production team, and suggested that, as in many of the other films examined in the thesis, Mexico becomes a space where the United States' cold war policies can be questioned.

While the tensions between coloniser and colonised are played out through space and movement in both *Border Incident* and *The Tijuana Story*, it is in *Touch of Evil* where regulatory power becomes most explicitly linked with mobility. Vargas, the hero, is physically mobile and through his ethnic ambiguity he is able to fluidly traverse both sides of the border. In contrast, the villain, Quinlan, becomes increasingly static as the film progresses, ending up stuck and putrefying in the canal. However, Vargas's movement forms a possessing, colonising power which fixes and regulates in the same manner as the camera movements, leaving other characters trapped and disappeared. In this chapter I argued that there is no clear moral outcome in *Touch of Evil*, and that it evokes the ambiguity and uncertainty with which colonialism was imbued in the US during the Cold War. Through its interrogation of regulation at the border, *Touch of Evil* sets in motion the tensions around the United States' role in the world in this cold war period. Echoing the fact that the language of colonialism was used by both left- and right-wing factions, *Touch of Evil* is conflicted and offers no clear position on the US's

relationship with Mexico or the rest of the world. However, the complex interactions which it depicts are clearly articulated through the themes of regulation and the language of colonialism. Together with chapters six and seven, part three of the thesis argued that colonialism became an important way in which filmmakers, including many outspokenly left-wing filmmakers, could explore the complex politics of the Cold War. Although these films all use the language of colonialism to articulate political debates, this does not result in an apolitical, homogenous or conservative consensus as Drew Casper, Paul Buhle, David Wagner and Ronald and Allis Radosh contend, but rather in complex works in which border crossing and the relationship between the United States and Mexico operate to synthesise, explore and challenge American cold war policy.⁵³³

In drawing together eight very different films of varying generic and production contexts through the cinematic location of the border, this thesis offers a different approach to studying cold war politics and Hollywood cinema. While many previous studies have focused on specific genres such as science fiction, film noir or westerns, here I have considered different films together as border films rather than genre films, removing them from generic frameworks and contexts. In bringing together a geographically-focused analysis of a specific cinematic location and the study of the political and cultural contexts of a particular historical period, I have hoped to contribute to understanding of the ways in which cinematic space operates as well as to understandings of cold war culture. In the case of the US-Mexico border, I have argued that American cinematic representations of this space during the Cold War were dominated by the themes of romance, revolution and regulation, and that a distinct concern with colonialism pervades all of these movies. Through the language of colonialism, the films engage with the complex debates around this issue which circulated in this period. The discourse of colonialism was absolutely central to cold war rhetoric and this area thus merits further investigation in cultural studies of the period.

The thesis aims to contribute to the growing area of cold war cultural studies, identified by Robert Griffith as a ‘cultural turn’ which has sought to redress an area of scholarship that has been ‘far too exclusively centered on the state and the “hard” realms of diplomacy, politics, and economics.’⁵³⁴ Equally, this study hopes not to fall

⁵³³ Casper, *Postwar Hollywood*, 5; Buhle and Wagner, *Dangerous Citizen*, xi; Radosh and Radosh, *Red Star*, viii.

⁵³⁴ Robert Griffith, ‘The Cultural Turn in Cold War Studies,’ *Reviews in American History* 29 (1) (2001): 153.

into the trap of failing to ‘appreciate the importance of political and economic power.’⁵³⁵ I have argued that cinema was an important medium through which the United States imagined and understood the US-Mexico border, and therefore that studying cinematic representations of this space is a vital way of investigating what the border meant historically. In contending that the border becomes a crucial site for the study of the United States’ place in the cold war world, I argued for the importance of studies of media within cold war studies. Through combining textual analysis with contextual historical research and a focus on the political affiliations of personnel involved in making the films, I have hoped to bring together culture and politics to an extent. However, I have not suggested that movies are simple conduits for political messages, but rather that they are cultural products, influenced by their contemporary political, historical and social contexts as well as by the whole team of personnel involved in their production. In attempting to reconstruct these contexts it is clear that we can build only partial understandings of what films might have meant to their contemporary cultures and what they might tell us about that period.

The thesis’ central contribution lies in its assertion that the study of a particular cinematic space can provide new ways of understanding cold war culture, and that, contrary to many existing studies, cinematic engagement with the Cold War is not limited to or defined by generic frameworks. I have argued that the border films analysed herein engage with cold war discourses of colonialism through the US-Mexico border and in spite of their respective genres. Using the borderline cinematic location as a way of questioning generic divisions, I have also sought to interrogate the cultural hierarchies that police and regulate the boundaries of genre. Crossing over and destabilising dominant generic borders, I have hoped to mobilise different, productive connections between film, culture and politics.⁵³⁶ In privileging aspects of films which traditional genre studies may ignore, I hope to contribute to the wider project of taking marginal, or borderline, cultural texts and their ostensible audiences seriously.

A clear link between left-wing filmmakers and depictions of the US-Mexico border also emerged from my research. The presence of Robert Aldrich, Burt Lancaster, Montalban, Orson Welles, Lloyd Bridges, Anthony Mann and others in production crews suggests that Mexican locations served as a cinematic draw for left and liberal personnel in Hollywood during this period. Therefore, the fact that Mexico is regularly

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 153.

⁵³⁶ See also Wojcik who uses the idea of the ‘apartment plot’ as location and genre to destabilise dominant generic frameworks. *Apartment Plot*, 7-9.

represented as a radical revolutionary space is, I argue, no coincidence. But I am not claiming that these border films present one singular left-wing political position. Further, it is only insofar as a shared discourse of colonialism pervades all of the texts that the politics of these border films seem to conform to the idea of an end of clear political ideology as articulated by Daniel Bell. Rather, the films are also diverse and non-homogeneous in their politics, presenting different and contradictory positions on colonialism and the United States' cold war policies. Just as Michael Denning argues was the case during the New Deal era, the thesis contends that Mexico provided space for political challenge and debate through multiculturalism, and that the border and Mexico beyond were thus highly and heterogeneously politically potent images in the United States during the cold war period.⁵³⁷

The future of the cinematic border

In this thesis I have contended that the way in which the border functions in my eight case study films is specific to the historical moment of the peak Cold War, and we might therefore assume that in different eras the cinematic border operates in different ways. The thesis has argued that representations of the border during the Cold War served not to engage with, debate or raise awareness of border policies, but as an arena where the United States' place in the wider world was negotiated. Representations of the border in American culture today may also be more closely concerned with the United States' global positioning in different ways, which is a significant implication given today's critical situation on the borderline itself. Certainly the US-Mexico border remains a popular cinematic location and appears across a wide variety of genres today. Films featuring the border such as *Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh, 2001), *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005), *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), *No Country for Old Men* (Ethan and Joel Coen, 2006), *Sin Nombre* (Cary Fukunaga, 2009) and *Monsters* (Gareth Edwards, 2010), operate across a wide variety of generic traditions and therefore analysing them through the cinematic location of the border may provide different ways of thinking about the relationship between film, genre and the US-Mexico boundary and between film and culture more generally. In TV too, the border is becoming a recurrent concern in shows such as *Breaking Bad* (Vince Gilligan, 2008-2013) and *The Bridge* (Elwood Reid, Björn Stein, Meredith

⁵³⁷ Denning, *Cultural Front*, 12-13.

Steihm, 2013), and investigating the ways in which these long-form narratives deal with the border differently could produce interesting insights into the connections between film, television and culture.

Understanding the relationship between the border and film in the United States continues to be a critical task, and not just because of the important role that Hollywood has historically played in shaping cultural understandings of the boundary. In 2009 the Texas Border Sheriff's Coalition launched 'Virtual Community Watch,' a public-private partnership which claims to 'empower the public to proactively participate in fighting border crime.'⁵³⁸ Virtual Community Watch is formed of a network of cameras and sensors along the Texas-Mexico border that feeds live video streaming to a website, enabling internet users to monitor the area and report suspicious activity to the Border Patrol. The Virtual Community Watch website enables people all around the world to sign up as 'virtual deputies' and to watch live feed from cameras in a variety of locations on the border, as well as the option to view archival films of thwarted attempts to cross the international boundary. Initially condemned as a measure that would 'invite extremists to participate in a virtual immigrant hunt' the scheme continues, with the Border Patrol attesting that it is helping to deter crime, and concerned civil liberties groups claiming it could incite vigilantism.⁵³⁹

The use of film at the border today is thus contributing to the limiting of mobility around and across the boundary. As its global users watch for border crossers remotely, the Virtual Community Watch system further participates in the fixing and delimiting of potential migrants and immigrants, as huge tracts of the boundary come under constant surveillance, mapped out by these cameras. The statement by former Texas State Senator Eliot Shapleigh quoted in the paragraph above paints an image of an extremist witch hunt where migrants and immigrants are hunted down and caught by virtual pursuers who possess an almost omniscient mobility through the vast network of cameras. This use of filmic technology at the border certainly replays the tensions around ideas of movement and stasis which thread through all of the case study texts examined in this thesis, and which participate in the representation of border crossings through romance, revolution and regulation.

⁵³⁸ Texas Border Patrol, Blueservo.net Program, accessed 23 July 2013, <http://www.blueservo.net/>. See also Secure Border Intelligence, 'Hidden Cameras on the Border,' accessed 23 July 2013, <http://secureborderintel.org/>.

⁵³⁹ Eliot Shapleigh, quoted in Claire Prentice, 'Armchair Deputies Enlisted to Patrol US-Mexico Border,' *BBC News*, 26 December 2009, accessed 23 July 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/8412603.stm>.

However, film is also becoming an important strand of migrant protection, as campaign group CAMBIO (Campaign for an Accountable, Moral and Balanced Immigration Overhaul) calls for all Border Patrol agents be equipped with lapel cameras to monitor their actions and deter abuse.⁵⁴⁰ Film is becoming inextricably entwined with the ways in which border crossing is policed today, and therefore it becomes crucial that we understand the way in which the US-Mexico border and film have been connected throughout their histories. Because this thesis has contended that cinema is one of the key spaces in which the United States imagines itself, the history of cinematic engagement with the borderline is therefore vital to understandings of the way in which the border operates in American culture today.

⁵⁴⁰ See 'CAMBIO Believes the Following Elements are Essential to Responsible Enforcement Activity in the Border Region,' accessed 23 July 2013, <http://cambio-us.org/>.

Appendix A: Indicative List of Cold War Border Films

- Bandido*. Richard Fleischer. 1956. Bandido Productions/United Artists Corp. Mexico and US.
- Big Steal, The*. Don Siegel. 1949. RKO Radio Pictures, Inc./RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. US.
- Black Whip, The*. Charles Maquis Warren. 1956. Regal Films, Inc./Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. US.
- Border Bandits*. Lambert Hillyer. 1946. Great Western Productions, Inc./Monogram Distributing Corp. US.
- Border City Rustlers*. Frank McDonald. 1952. William F. Broidy Pictures Corp.; Newhall Productions/Allied Artists Pictures. US.
- Border Fence*. H. W. Keir and Norman Sheldon. 1951. Astor Pictures Corp./Astor Pictures Corp. US.
- Border Incident*. Anthony Mann. 1949. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp/Loew's Inc. US.
- Border Outlaws*. Richard Talmadge. 1950. Jack Schwarz Productions, Inc.; United International, Inc./Eagle-Lion Films, Inc. US.
- Border Rangers*. William Berke. 1950. Lippert Productions, Inc./Lippert Pictures, Inc. US.
- Border River*. George Sherman. 1954. Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc./Universal Pictures Co., Inc. US.
- Border Treasure*. George Archainbaud. 1950. RKO Radio Pictures, Inc./RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. US.
- Borderline*. William A. Seiter. 1950. Borderline Productions Corp./Universal Pictures Company, Inc. US.
- Bottom of the Bottle, The*. Henry Hathaway. 1955. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp./Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. US.
- Branded*. Rudolph Maté. 1951. Paramount Pictures Corp./Paramount Pictures Corp. US.
- Canyon Ambush*. Lewis D. Collins. 1952. Slivermine Productions/Monogram Pictures Corp. US.
- Cowboy*. Delmer Daves. 1958. Phoenix Pictures Corp./Columbia Pictures Corp. US.
- Fast and the Furious, The*. John Ireland. 1954. Pablo Alto Productions, Inc./American Releasing Corp.; State Rights. US.

Federal Agent at Large. George Blair. 1950. Republic Pictures Corp./Republic Pictures Corp. US.

Federal Man. Robert Tansey. 1950. Jack Schwarz Productions, Inc./Eagle-Lion Films, Inc. US.

Fort Apache. John Ford. 1948. Argosy Pictures Corp./RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. US.

Four Guns to the Border. Richard Carlson. 1954. Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc./Universal Pictures Co., Inc. US.

Fugitive, The. John Ford. 1947. Argosy Pictures Corp./RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. US.

Gun Crazy. Joseph H. Lewis. 1950. King Bros. Productions, Inc./United Artists Corp. US.

Gunfire at Indian Gap. Joseph Kane. 1957. Ventura Productions, Inc./Republic Pictures Corp. US.

His Kind of Woman. John Farrow. 1951. RKO Radio Pictures, Inc.; A John Farrow Production/RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. US.

King of the Bandits. Christy Cabanne. 1947. Monogram Productions, Inc./Monogram Distributing Corp. US.

Man of the West. Anthony Mann. 1958. Ashton Productions, Inc./United Artists Corp. US.

Out of the Past. Jacques Tourneur. 1947. RKO Radio Pictures, Inc./RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. US.

Over the Border. Wallace W. Fox. 1950. Monogram Productions, Inc./Monogram Distributing Corp. US.

Pals of the Golden West. William Winey. 1951. Republic Pictures Corp./Republic Pictures Corp. US.

Rancho Notorious. Fritz Lang. 1952. Fidelity Pictures, Inc./RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. US.

Red River. Howard Hawks. 1946. Monterey Productions, Inc./United Artists Corp. US.

Ride the Pink Horse. Robert Montgomery. 1947. Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc./Universal Pictures Company, Inc. US.

Rio Bravo. Howard Hawks. 1959. Armada Productions, Inc./Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. US.

Rio Grande. John Ford. 1950. Argosy Pictures Corp./Republic Pictures Corp. US.

Rio Grande Patrol. Lesley Selander. 1950. RKO Radio Pictures, Inc./RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. US.

River's Edge, The. Allan Dwan. 1957. Elmcrest Productions, Inc./Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. US.

Salt of the Earth. Herbert Biberman. 1954. The International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers; Independent Productions Corp./IPC Distributors, Inc.; Independent Productions Corp. US.

San Antone. Joe Kane. 1952. Republic Pictures Corp./Republic Pictures Corp. US.

Searchers, The. John Ford. 1956. C. V. Whitney Pictures/Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. US.

Surrender. Allan Dwan. 1950. Republic Pictures Corp./Republic Pictures Corp. US.

Tijuana Story, The. Leslie Kardos. 1957. Clover Productions, Inc./Columbia Pictures Corp. US.

Treasure of Pancho Villa, The. George Sherman. 1955. Edmund Grainger Productions, Inc.; RKO Radio Pictures, Inc./RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. Mexico and US.

Treasure of the Sierra Madre, The. John Huston. 1948. Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc./Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. US.

They Came to Cordura. Robert Rossen. 1959. Goetz Pictures, Inc.; Baroda Productions, Inc.; A William Goetz Production/Columbia Pictures Corp. US.

Touch of Evil. Orson Welles. 1958. Universal-International Pictures Co., Inc./Universal Pictures Co., Inc. US.

Trigger, Jr. William Witney. 1950. Republic Pictures Corp./Republic Pictures Corp. US.

Under Mexicali Stars. George Blair. 1950. Republic Pictures Corp./Republic Pictures Corp. US.

Vera Cruz. Robert Aldrich. 1954. Flora Productions; Hecht-Lancaster Productions/United Artists Corp. Mexico and US.

Villa!! James Clark. 1958. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp./Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. Mexico and US.

Viva Zapata! Elia Kazan. 1952. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp./Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. US.

Wayward Bus, The. Victor Vicas. 1957. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp./Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp. US.

Wetbacks. Hank McCune. 1956. Banner Pictures, Inc; Pacific Coast Pictures/Gibraltar Motion Picture Distributors, Inc.; Realart Film Exchange. US.

Where Danger Lives. John Farrow. 1950. RKO Radio Pictures, Inc.; Westwood Productions, Inc./RKO Radio Pictures, Inc. US.

Woman They Almost Lynched. Allan Dwan. 1953. Republic Pictures Corp./Republic Pictures Corp. US.

Appendix B: Publications

An earlier version of chapter four of the thesis appeared in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* as “‘Filmed Entirely in Mexico’: *Vera Cruz* (1954) and the Politics of Mexico in American Cinema,’ *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 41 (1) (2013): 20-30.

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