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Glenn Martinez

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# RIO BRAVO



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GLENN MARTINEZ,  
EDITOR





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## Editor's Introduction

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As I assume the editorial responsibilities of this fine scholarly journal, I am heartened by the quality of this cross-section of scholarly work about the border. Beginning in 2008, I assumed the editorship of *Rio Bravo* as my old teacher, colleague, and friend, Dr. Mark Glazer, began his well-deserved retirement. Mark has left some big shoes for me to fill, having founded this journal and having disseminated it widely to over 200 subscribers. Mark's vision for *Rio Bravo* was to create a reliable and respectable outlet for the publication of high quality scholarship related to the U.S.-Mexico border region. Over the years, Mark's vision was realized and *Rio Bravo* quickly became the number one source for solid research on the border with a cultural bent. As the new editor of this fine journal, it is my intention to maintain Mark's vision and to sustain his accomplishments as the foundation for the future of this journal. To that end, I have initiated a new structure for the journal which, I earnestly hope, will continue to meet the needs of the scholarly community working on border issues and, at the same time, draw in a new readership from a variety of culturally-informed disciplines. Published in two volumes per year, *Rio Bravo* will now appear as one special issue dedicated to a single topic and edited by a scholar in a specific field and as one general issue including a cross-section of the most recent and innovative scholarship from across the disciplines. This year, we have already inaugurated this new structure. Volume 1:1 of the new series focused specifically on women on the border and was guest edited by Dr. Guadalupe Cortina, one of the nation's most respected scholars on Latin American women's literature. Volume 1:2, the volume you now hold in your hands, on the other hand is a general issue including articles from the fields of public health, political science, education, literature, and psychology.

*Rio Bravo* was also founded as a bi-national journal meant to bridge the gap between scholars working on the Mexican side

of the border and those working on the U.S. side of the border. Mark's vision for *Rio Bravo* was to create a forum of scholarly dialogue where Mexican and U.S. scholars could meet and explore creative solutions to common problems. This is also a feature of *Rio Bravo* which I intend to maintain and highlight. To that end, *Rio Bravo* has established a partnership with the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León. This new arrangement serves as a conduit for us to receive articles from our colleagues in Mexico and as a mechanism for distribution of the journal throughout Mexico. I am very proud of this new arrangement which promises to ensure greater visibility for our contributing authors and to generate life-long relationships between scholars and practitioners on both sides of the border.

Finally, *Rio Bravo* was initiated on a shoe-string budget which significantly limited its freedom to explore new layout and design options. I was fortunate to receive a well-established and highly sought after journal from Mark. Because of that, I was able to explore new designs and layout patterns for the journal. The issue that you hold in your hands, as well as the previous issue, feature a new design which we feel is more attractive and a new layout that is easier on the eye. I hope that you enjoy it.

I look forward to the opportunity of serving you as editor of this journal and would encourage you to send in your manuscripts, inform your colleagues and friends about this unique venue for the publication of scholarly work about the border, and recommend a *Rio Bravo* subscription to your library or center.

Dr. Glenn A. Martínez, Editor

Edinburg, Texas



# AIDS, diabetes, and lung cancer mortality at the northern Mexican border: 1979-1997

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Tim A. Clary  
*Emerging Markets Group, Ltd.*

## **Abstract**

Se están comparando las tasas de mortalidad de tres enfermedades entre siete ciudades de la frontera Norte de México y siete ciudades no fronterizas para analizar si el mayor desarrollo económico en las zonas fronterizas afectó positivamente la salud en el periodo entre 1979 y 1997.

A comparison of mortality rates associated with three diseases in three cities on the northern border of Mexico in order to determine whether increasing economic development activities have positively affected health outcomes between 1979 and 1997.

## **Background**

In 1965 the Mexican government announced the creation of the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) that permitted U.S. firms to import into Mexico equipment and materials to be processed as duty free finished products for re-export by the Mexican factories known as maquiladoras. The primarily foreign-owned maquiladoras employ semi-skilled or unskilled labor and are mostly concentrated in a few manufacturing regions. Behind BIP lay the hope that the historically isolated northern border would become an economic growth pole for the region, if not the whole country, further integrate the border into the Mexican economy, and provide a balance to the primacy of Mexico City.

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Geographic limits were imposed upon maquiladoras during the early years of BIP (Barry, 1994), but by the end of 1972 the Mexican government permitted maquiladoras to be established essentially nationwide. While the concept has become functional, the reality has remained largely territorial. Even after the 1994 implementation of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) most maquiladoras continued to be concentrated along the border between Tijuana and Matamoros during the 1990s (CIEMEX-WEFA, 1998).

Because of the largely state-led economic development policies behind BIP it could be expected that there would be greater cohesive coordination between the process of industrialization, urbanization, and health improvement at the northern Mexican border than in a more market driven process (Easterlin, 1996). Links between economic development, social and physical infrastructure and those factors that influence disease transmission and prevention have long been assessed (Roemer, 1978; Leisinger, 1984). Research shows that the most important health profile indicator has been income (Hunter, 1990), though, the effect of rising income tends to plateau at higher per capita income levels (Preston, 1976). After a certain threshold is reached, health profile improvement must be fine-tuned through other sociocultural factors. Most debates on the linkages between economic development and health have centered on which is the primary driving force and which is the by-product (Mandelbaum, 1945; Nurkse, 1953; Rostow, 1960; Mushkin, 1968; Wheeler, 1980; Malenbaum, 1983). Many current theorists have come to realize that these two elusive concepts are interdependent and have parallel courses.

Like most other economically transitioning countries Mexico has faced what many researchers call the double burden of disease; the traditional set of health problems (communicable diseases, reproductive diseases, respiratory diseases, and environmental sanitation), and the burden of diseases associated with developed countries, especially cardiovascular diseases, malignant neoplasms, and diseases associated with lifestyle choices. Diseases associated with lifestyle choices have impacted the northern Mexican border as highly mobile, marginalized populations experienced the erosion of traditional values as part of the border's rapid urbanization (Stehney, 1994). Whether urbanization equates with better health is debatable since many aspects of development theory have held

the assumption that development and urbanization will be associated with improved health, yet, many examples have disproved this (Phillips et al., 1994).

To examine some of these debates, in this study I examine mortality data for seven border cities against seven non-border cities for three diseases. The diseases examined include: AIDS (the late stage of HIV infection); diabetes; and lung cancer. This is to distinguish if mortality for these three diseases has varied between these two sets of sites and whether different variables account for any differences in levels.

In a strongly Catholic, machismo culture such as Mexico, sexual promiscuity among women is censured and homosexuality is highly stigmatized (Carrier, 1995); however, in areas where a large percentage of the population is transitory and the social infrastructure is weaker, the normally restrictive social norms may be relaxed. AIDS, therefore, may be able to serve as a proxy of the social infrastructure of a given area. Because diabetes prevalence in Mexico is higher among women and the obese (Guerrero-Romero, 1997; Castro-Sanchez, 1997), diabetes can serve as a proxy for socioeconomic status (i.e. nutrition and status of women based on education). Finally, studies of lung cancer in Mexico have shown that an important portion of lung cancer patients were not smokers and, thus, other factors such as second-hand smoke influenced by crowded living conditions need to be investigated (Medina, 1996). Additionally, Hispanic women typically have relatively low rates of smoking (Winkleby, 1995; Haynes, 1990), thus, a high level of mortality among women could indicate weaknesses in the social infrastructure. Given these possible risk factors, lung cancer mortality can serve as a proxy for the level of both social and physical infrastructure.

## **Methods**

### **Data**

Data for this research is from three broad categories: census data, health data and maquiladora data. The Mexican census which is performed every ten years provides socioeconomic data at the municipio level. The municipios, a Mexican political unit, in this study are geographically similar in size to metropolitan areas. Mortality data were obtained from the *Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública* (National Institute of Public Health) (INSP) for 1979-1997-

a total of 82,941 records. AIDS data were only available starting in 1988. In the file were year and month of death, cause of death, sex, age, and location. A total of 1682 records were deleted because of uncertainties in the data.

Mortality data for Tijuana and Mexicali were presented as one geographic unit, which necessitated combining the other data for the two municipios. This reduced the total number of study sites from 14 to 13. The calculation of other variables for Tijuana and Mexicali was based on the ratio of the populations of these two municipios in 1980 and 1990. In 1980 the ratio was 53:47 for Mexicali and Tijuana respectively. In 1990 this ratio had become 45:55.

Health care data for 1994 were obtained from the "*Boletín de información estadística*," (Bulletin of Statistical Information) a publication issued by the *Secretaría de Salud* (Secretary of Health) of Mexico. Data regarding maquiladora employment and total number of factories by location were obtained from three different sources (Lorey-USMBS, 1993; INEGI, 1998; CIEMEX-WFEFA, 1998). This included for the border municipios the years from 1975-1998 and for the interior municipios the figures covering the years from 1987-1998.

#### Variables

Seven border municipios (Juárez, Matamoros, Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa, Tijuana and Mexicali) were chosen for analysis because they have contained the vast majority of maquiladoras that employ a great number of persons (Lorey-USMBS, 1993). While each of these cities does have characteristics peculiar to its own locale they all share the distinction of being the prime beneficiaries of BIP and are often referred to as one epidemiological unit (Soberon, 1989; Ellis 1997).

Seven non-border municipios (Guadalajara, León, Mérida, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Torreón and Veracruz) were chosen for contrast based on their population size and growth, and sizable economic bases. However, these economies have developed without any one particular policy being implemented such as BIP.

Independent variables from the 1980 and 1990 censuses

included the following (INEGI 1980, INEGI 1990; CONAP, 1993):

- 1). Demographic: total population; age and sex structure; percentage of population born in and outside the municipio; marital status; population growth; changes in the age and sex structure; and population density;
- 2). Housing: percentage of population living in housing without electricity; percentage of persons living in housing considered "crowded";
- 3). Literacy indicators;
- 4). Economic: percentage of population by sex that is economically active; percentage of the population living on wages unable to meet their basic needs.

The available health care data for the time period at a specific enough geographic level was limited and, thus, the relevant variables were limited to: number of physicians per 100,000; percent of physicians that were general practitioners per 100,000 and; number of general consultations during the year per 100,000

It was also necessary to differentiate between migration-related secondary transmission and a more simple geographic relocation of disease. Migration data was limited in only presenting levels of migration along with state of origin. A crude proxy measure of migration for the municipios was calculated based on the number of persons migrating to the state and then dividing that number by the proportion of the municipio's population to the total state population.

Two other variables were used in the analysis; "Year" which was treated as a continuous variable and used to control for variations over time and; a dummy variable was included to indicate border or interior location.

#### *Variables for Diseases Specific Analysis*

Studies of HIV/AIDS in Mexico have shown that it is overwhelmingly a disease afflicting homosexual or bisexual men (Mohar, 1995; Valdespino-Gomez, 1995; Izazola-Licea, 1995) and areas with high rates of internal and international migration (del Rio-Zolezzi, 1995; Magis-Rodriguez, 1995). Included in the analysis are indicators for marital status based on the assumption that unmarried men (and women) are more likely to have more sexual partners.

Other variables included are proxies for educational status, economic status, percentage of the population that is male, health care availability, and population density as a proxy for social interaction.

Because diabetes has been shown to disproportionately affect Hispanic females and to be related to obesity, proxies for both were included in the analysis. Thus, the percentage of population that was female, the percentage of females that were economically active, the percentage of housing without electricity, and the percentage of households unable to meet its basic needs were used.

For lung cancer the general variables of education, economic status, and health care accessibility were included. Since in Mexico a much larger percent of men smoke than women the percentage of the population that was male was used. Finally, a proxy for second-hand smoke (crowded living conditions) was included.

#### *Statistical Analysis*

Yearly mortality rates were calculated for each disease for each study site and then standardized to the 1990 Mexican population age distribution to control for age at death or illness. Some AIDS mortality rates were equal to zero. Based on previous similar research (Scribner, 1998) observations with zero values were assigned a value equal to one half of the lowest observation for inclusion in the analysis. Disease rates were then collapsed into two regional categories (border and interior) and tested for significance. Risk ratios were then calculated for these two regions.

Three series of bivariate correlations were performed. First, death rates for individual border cities were correlated with maquiladora employment. Second, maquiladora employment was correlated with death rates for the two regional categories. Third, death rates were correlated with each other for all sites to see if there was a possibility of mutual influence and interaction.

Variables of interest for regression were then tested for correlation to reduce later chances of multicollinearity. All variables included in the analysis (except year) were transformed to their base 10 logarithm to adjust for skew and to permit analysis as a percent change in the dependent variable associated with a 1%

increase in the predictor variable (Pindyck, 1989).

Using a priori knowledge, hierarchical regression models for both mortality and morbidity as dependent variables were built and run in several different combinations. The regional grouping was later tested using analysis of covariance for its between-group significance. For some disease rates some cities deemed outliers (i.e. consistently exceeding the next highest value by two-fold over time) were excluded in a second computation of the regression model. Residuals were tested for time-series autocorrelation using the Durbin-Watson statistic.

## **Results**

### *Descriptive socioeconomic variables*

Given that the border had better levels of literacy and economic participation (Table I) it could be reasonably expected that this region would either have comparable or better living conditions than the interior municipios. That does not appear to be the case. As Table I also shows nearly 11% of the border population was in housing without electricity compared to only slightly more than 4% of the interior municipios. Additionally, Table I shows further evidence of the disparities between the physical infrastructure at border and the interior for the time period in question. While interior municipios had on average a greater percentage of persons unable to meet their basic needs (55.02%) they still managed to have fewer persons living in housing that was considered crowded (44.63 versus 48.53 for the border). The percent of persons living in crowded housing may be related to the overall density which for the border was approximately 4.7 times higher than the interior region.

Additionally, the interior municipios appear to have been better served by health care. In all the measures, except one (percent of physicians as general practitioners), the interior municipios ranked higher than the border municipios. This may indicate that, even though health care was more available in terms of the number of physicians in the interior, there may have been more accessibility to health care at the border.

Finally, the percentage change of persons born outside the various municipios in 1980 and 1990 was consistently higher at the

border. Indeed, in ranking the percentage change born outside the municipios between 1980 and 1990 three border municipios occupied the top three spots (Nogales, Juárez and Tijuana at 4.3%, 3.5%, and 2.4% respectively).

#### *Correlation analysis*

Table 2 shows that the mortality rates for AIDS and diabetes were correlated with growth in maquiladoras and maquiladora employment. Only at the border did lung cancer mortality correlate with maquiladora growth and employment. Additionally, though not shown, AIDS and diabetes mortality were associated with each other. In nine of the thirteen study sites AIDS and diabetes mortality were correlated at .50 and above.

#### *Statistical analysis of specific diseases: the border and the interior* [FIGURE 1 HERE]

The risk from dying from AIDS, as presented in Figure 1, was consistently higher in the interior (risk ratio ranged from 2.38-4.64), but appears to be diminishing. Indeed, the highest risk was at the beginning of the time period and the lowest at the end due to the very low initial death rates at the border. However, it is important to note that for both the border and the interior municipios the trend is upward with the interior municipios showing a greater increase.

Consistently higher rates for AIDS mortality were found in four interior municipios (Veracruz, Guadalajara, Mérida, and Puebla) while some municipios, notably Nogales, Nuevo Laredo and León, reported no cases for several early years. Since the time period began in 1988 and the HIV/AIDS epidemic was first noted in North America as early as 1984, it is highly unlikely that these three urban centers had no cases as late as 1988.

Examining Table 3, which gives the regression and covariance analysis for all three diseases, shows that most of the variables believed to influence AIDS mortality were shown to be significant and to be in the direction of their supposed influence. However, the amount of influence that percentage of 1990 female population 15+ and illiterate and the percentage of female population 12+ and economically active were surprising. Total percentage of the



population that is single and population density show a negative correspondence. However, this influence is comparatively small requiring nearly a 19% decrease to change AIDS mortality by 1%. Like the crude risk ratio the coefficient for being at the border shows a negative relationship affirming the significant greater risk of dying from AIDS if living in an interior municipio. [FIGURE 2 HERE]

The mortality rates for diabetes for the interior and border are fairly close together giving a limited range of risk ratios (1.002-1.39) and only in 1989 did the risk for the border population exceed the risk for the interior population (Figure 2). In both cases the trend is upward. Prior to 1988 the highest rates of diabetes mortality were usually in the interior municipios. However, after 1988 the highest rates were at the border.

In Table 3 it can be seen that all of the factors thought to influence diabetes mortality did, indeed, have an effect. After adjusting for possible confounders it can be seen that living at the border slightly increases the risk of dying from diabetes. This corresponds with what was previously hypothesized; namely that the border population translated their increased incomes into more Western lifestyles, including dietary habits.

While most of the variables entered into the model followed their expected patterns (higher income but lower education lead to greater risk for diabetes) the amount of female economic activity does not. Also important to note is that the female percentage of the population had less of an influence on diabetes mortality than socioeconomic indicators. The diabetes model may not apply as well to the two sub-groupings as demonstrated by the ANCOVA results and there may be some serial autocorrelation in the data given the Durbin-Watson statistic (.96). However, since the time period analyzed was over 18 years the serial autocorrelation may be an artifact of the data.

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

The border municipios had consistently higher levels of lung cancer mortality than the interior municipios and in 1994 those rates began to diverge further (Figure 3); a border municipio had the highest rate of mortality from lung cancer for 18 of the 19 years of study. In some years (1979 & 1989) the rates for the

border municipios were much higher than the interior. For example, in 1989 Nogales' rate of 25.99/100,000 was more than double that of the highest interior municipio (Guadalajara at 11.56/100,000).

Prior to analysis, the crude risk from dying from lung cancer was greater at the border than the interior. Once other possible explanatory variables were controlled for the risk for dying based on location reversed itself (Table 3). However, given that the range of crude risk ratios was small, this is plausible.

All of the variables thought to influence lung cancer mortality were significant and their influence was in the direction hypothesized. The percentage of the population that was male shows a small positive influence. The percentage of the females who were economically active shows a positive influence and the percentage of persons living in crowded housing showed a positive influence. The two health variables showed the greatest influence in that a small increase in either of these two variables lead to an increase in lung cancer mortality. Also notable is the large ANCOVA f-value that highlights that there are significant differences between interior and border groupings.

## **Discussion**

In general, the variables for each disease were significant and their influence was in the direction presupposed. The three mortality data sets showed results that were consistent with previous studies (Mohar, 1995; Castro-Sanchez, 1997; Lazcano, 1997). That these diseases associated with a "Western" lifestyle were correlated with the growth in maquiladoras is not surprising.

Given a rise in disposable income one can also expect a change in lifestyle habits, including diet, and, perhaps, more social permissiveness.

While the risk from dying from AIDS has been consistently lower at the border, this risk may be obscured by bias in the data.

U.S. officials were concerned that Mexico was underreporting its AIDS cases (Hatcher, 1985), though it is unknown whether this underreporting is systematic and if it continues today. This could be due to a later arrival of the HIV epidemic in Mexico or possible misclassification bias as earlier deaths may not have been attributed to AIDS. Guadalajara, which showed an early detection of the

disease and was ranked highly in all health care statistics, for example, may have had better diagnostic facilities and, therefore, an earlier and higher mortality rate.

That the percentage of the 1990 population that was male showed an influence on AIDS deaths is not surprising given that in Mexico AIDS has been primarily a disease afflicting gay and bisexual males. Nor is it surprising that the percentage of physicians who were general practitioners showed an influence or the percentage of the population born outside of the municipio. Having a greater percentage of general practitioners may provide better detection and classification of the disease while having a greater percentage of immigrants to an area might provide less social structure and more sexual permissiveness. As the percentage illiteracy increased so did the chance of dying from AIDS. Likewise, as economic activity for women increased so too did the chances of contracting HIV and, hence, dying from AIDS. That these two factors may have a larger influence on AIDS mortality than the percentage male may be an additional indicator that the HIV epidemic in Mexico transitioned in the 1990s from one that is more related to socioeconomic status than sexual orientation.

Mortality from diabetes was shown to be higher at the border. This is not surprising as it was hypothesized that rising incomes at the border would lead to greater adoption of a Western diet based on higher levels of acculturation. It was also expected that greater female economic activity would lead to higher levels of diabetes mortality because of higher incomes and further adaptation of Western eating habits, however, it did not. This may be explained by greater female activity leading to a less sedentary lifestyle and greater dietary choices.

While the crude risk for dying from lung cancer was greater at the border, this risk was slightly reduced once other factors were controlled. This may be due to the ability of border residents to access and afford better health care and treatment, thus, shifting mortality from lung cancer into morbidity. These two variables in conjunction with the negative influence of being at the border indicate that a death from lung cancer may have more to do with available health care.

One possible risk factor for lung cancer mortality at the

border might be acculturation leading to a higher propensity of immigrants to begin smoking. Hispanic populations have been shown to be at a higher risk for smoking and acculturation has been linked to smoking in Hispanic adults and adolescents (Epstein, 1998). At the border, where a large proportion of the population have been migrants and the "culture" is a mixture of both Mexican and American, it could be expected that there would be high rates of smoking. Compounding the problem and, perhaps, having greater impact on the health of border residents has been the persistent marketing of tobacco in the region (Power, 1998).

The peculiarities of the northern Mexican border and their influence on public health must be acknowledged. This is a region where two countries with different standards and costs of living, political and health systems meet, leading to both benefits and costs accruing for the border. The governments of both the U.S. and Mexico have long recognized the need for binational cooperation on border issues. For example, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association (USMBHA) have both worked to find solutions through joint action on both sides of the border. Likewise, the Border Epidemiological Center for HIV/AIDS Control worked to reduce HIV transmission (Izazola-Licea, 1991; Sepulveda, 1992).

One health benefit of residing along the U.S.-Mexico border is the possible cross-utilization of health services by Mexican nationals. While the typical percentage of Mexican border residents seeking care in the United States has been shown to be small (Guendelman, 1993; Ellis, 1996;), that option does exist. According to past National Satisfaction Surveys, 5.7% of the medical needs among border adults are not met, versus 7.9% nationwide (Ellis, 1996).

The health care offered by transnational corporations (TNCs) to their employees cannot be discounted either. However, this impact is probably minimal given that in Mexico maquiladoras only employed approximately 1% of the total population in the 1990s (USEPA/SEDUE, 1997) and even along the border that percentage has rarely exceeded 20% (Suárez y Toriello, 1996). Given the high rate of turnover in most maquiladoras and the limited health care usually offered by TNCs this benefit reduces even further. Additionally, the growth in maquiladora employment actually

corresponded with the increases in the mortality rates for the three diseases.

BIP was set-up to attract migrants to the border and provide employment for them. The effect of such a large migrant community on the border would be multi-faceted. The first would be a possible weaker social structure and, therefore, a likely high rate of lifestyle and communicable diseases. But conversely, migration theory holds that it is the youngest and healthiest that most often migrate (Castles, 1993; Harris, 1995). This would lead one to believe that the overall health of this area should have improved as young migrants entered this region and the age structure changed.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

Mexico, like many countries, has problems with data accuracy and availability of certain variables for precise geographic analysis. This can be mitigated by relying on several data sources over long periods of time, but for some data this was not possible. Most of the independent variables were cross-sectional because of the reliance on the 1990 census data. There are periodic surveys typically performed every year, but the resultant data from those surveys are aggregated to the state level.

This research also would have been stronger had more detailed migration data been available. It is possible for a person to become ill in one region, migrate to another and then have their ill health profile be reflected in the statistics of the recipient region.

Mexican migration data are typically only available for every ten years and are aggregated to the state level. In other words, it is only possible to account at a gross level the flow of migrants.

This was a mixed ecological study and, therefore, can suffer from ecological bias. However, ecological studies do have benefits.

Primarily, they are efficient means of evaluating the effectiveness of intervention programs or implemented policies, and are useful in identifying certain types of "contextual" effects on individual risk (Morgenstern, 1998) or unintended effects of population interventions (Morgenstern, 1982). They can be used to test or screen new etiologic hypotheses regarding the possible effects of a specific exposure on several health outcomes. Finally, it should be noted that the geographical unit used in this study is fairly small in

comparison to other studies (Grosse, 1983; Cumper, 1984; Preston, 1975) that have investigated similar health effects of policy interventions.

One of the main strengths of this research is its originality. A review of the extant literature revealed little research conducted on the impact of maquiladoras on public health in general. Previous studies focused on small subpopulations within export processing zones (EPZs), namely employees of TNCs, or have been mostly descriptive (Frumkin, 1995; Hatcher, 1995). Most previous studies have demonstrated that employees in EPZs faced numerous occupational hazards, but have not examined health status at a larger scale. By using several different study sites, including the border and interior, this research at least partially overcame this.

This research also covered a range of diseases of import and, therefore, can make broader statements about health at the border. It was first hypothesized that the lack of physical and social infrastructure at the border affected the health of the resident populations in several ways. By obtaining data on AIDS, diabetes and lung cancer a more extensive picture of the health status at the border emerges.

## **Conclusions**

The Mexico-U.S. border is a unique region of the world. Nevertheless, even with that caveat in mind, more general principles can be sought. What a country considering implementing a regionally-targeted, economic development policy cannot assume is that it will lead to better health. As an example of this, the Border Industrialization Program which was never explicitly intended to improve health at the border did not result in any significant differences in AIDS, diabetes, and lung cancer mortality for the region. What has been shown is that the main outcome is a different health profile; not necessarily a better health profile. The even larger principle is that areas with better economic conditions may not be able to translate their increases in wealth to increases in health or even bettering their standard of living. Economically advantaged areas may only be able to shift higher rates of mortality to morbidity.

The higher risks at the border, such as social permissiveness,

acculturation, the marketing of harmful products, and the adoption of a Western diet, appear to be at least partially reduced by the benefits of its unique location. The economic growth of the region, the binational health programs, and the accessibility of health care have dampened the more harmful aspects and have, perhaps, shifted what would have been deaths into long-term disabilities.

As was also shown by this research, despite the implementation of a policy designed to economically favor the northern Mexican border, the general living conditions there were worse in comparison to their non-border equivalents. Subsequently, the border still faces the burden of communicable and lifestyle diseases. The question then arises for other regions of what can be expected for their health status when they do not share the propinquity to a more economically developed country as the northern Mexican border does.

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**Table 1. Selected literacy and economic indicators for the border and interior, 1990**

	Percent of 15+ population that was illiterate	Percent of 12+ population that was economically active	Percent of occupants in housing without electricity	Percent of occupants living in housing considered crowded	Percentage of population unable to meet their basic needs
Border average	4.48	34.04	10.86	48.53	48.86
Interior average	6.05	32.10	4.03	44.63	55.02

Source: INEGI (1990); CONAPO (1993).

**Table 2. Number of maquiladoras and maquiladora employment correlation with mortality rates by border and interior location**

Location	Maquilas/AIDS	Maquilas/DM	Maquilas/LC	Employ/AIDS	Employ/DM	Employ/LC
Border	0.87	0.61	0.54	0.91	0.67	0.65
Interior	0.95	0.68	0.12	0.95	0.79	0.09

DM = diabetes mellitus; LC = lung cancer; Maquilas = number of maquiladoras;

Employ = number of maquiladora employees

**Table 3. Regression and covariance analysis for AIDS mortality (1988-1997); diabetes mortality (1979-1997); and lung cancer mortality (1979-1997)**

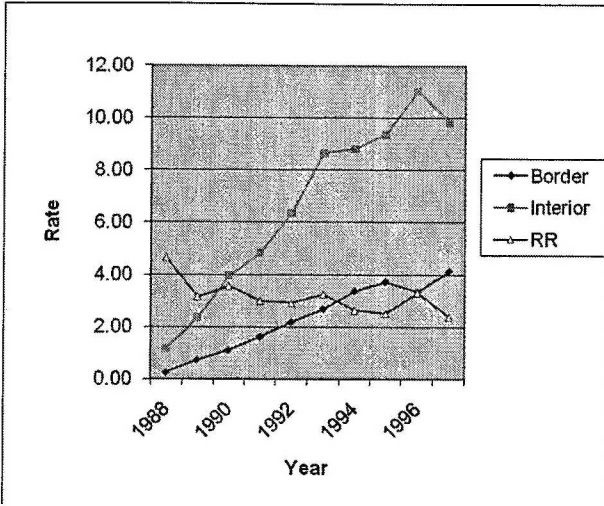
Variable	AIDS Coefficients	AIDS ANCOVA F-values	Diabetes Coefficients	Diabetes ANCOVA F-values	Lung cancer Coefficients	Lung cancer ANCOVA F-values
Year	.12 **	.53 **	.01 **	.32 **	.004 *	.03 *
Percent of 1990 municipio population born outside of the municipio	3.40 **	.42 **	-.66 *	.36 **	.08 **	.60 **
Percent of 1990 population that was male	17.36 (.06)	.96 **	-	-	.18 *	.14 (.71)
Percent of 1990 population that was Female	-	-	.92 **	.88 (.02)	-	-
Percent of 1990 population 12+ years old and single	-18.72 **	.52 *	-	-	-	-
Doctors per 100,000	-	-	-.39 **	.02 (.89)	.47 **	.23 **
General medical consultations per 100,000	-	-	-	-	.21 *	.33 (.02)
Percent of physicians that were general practitioners	2.64 *	.02 (.88)	-	-	-	-
Percent of 1990 female population 15+ yrs. old and illiterate	1.94 **	.47 (.07)	1.10 **	.88 (.17)	-	-

**Table 3 continued. Regression and covariance analysis for AIDS mortality (1988-1997); diabetes mortality (1979-1997); and lung cancer mortality (1979-1997)**

Percent of 1990 female pop. 12+ yrs. old and economically active	6.14 **	4.67 (.03)	-3.63 **	.22 (.64)	2.82 **	38.51 **
Percent of 1990 population unable to meet basic needs	-	-	-1.48 **	.28 **	-	-
Percent of 1990 population living in housing without electricity	-	-	.11 **	.22 *	-	-
Percent of 1990 population living in housing considered crowded	-	-	-	-	.94 *	1.59 (.21)
Persons per square kilometer	-1.08 **	.55 **	-	-	-	-
Border	-1.52 **	.08 **	.24 **	.03 *	-.18 *	.56 **

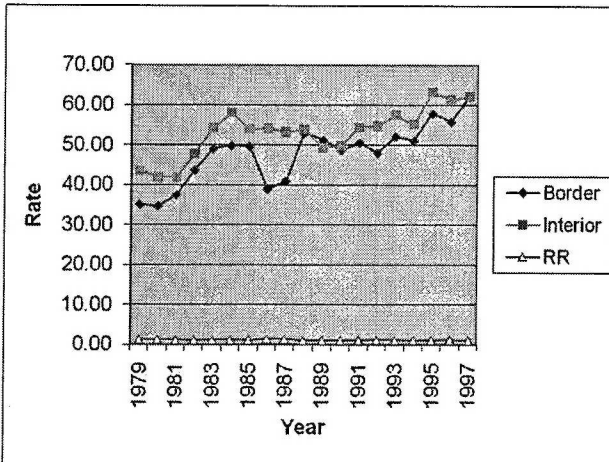
\* =  $p < .01$ ; \*\* =  $p < .001$ ; N = number of municipios x number of years  
 AIDS: N = 130; adjusted r-square = .73;  $pr > F = < .0001$ ; DW = 1.67  
 Lung cancer: N = 247; adjusted r-square = .51;  $pr > F = < .0001$ ; DW = 1.08  
 Diabetes: N = 247; adjusted r-square = .43;  $pr > F = < .0001$ ; DW = .96

Figure 1. Standardized mortality rates for AIDS per 100,000 interior versus border, 1988-1997



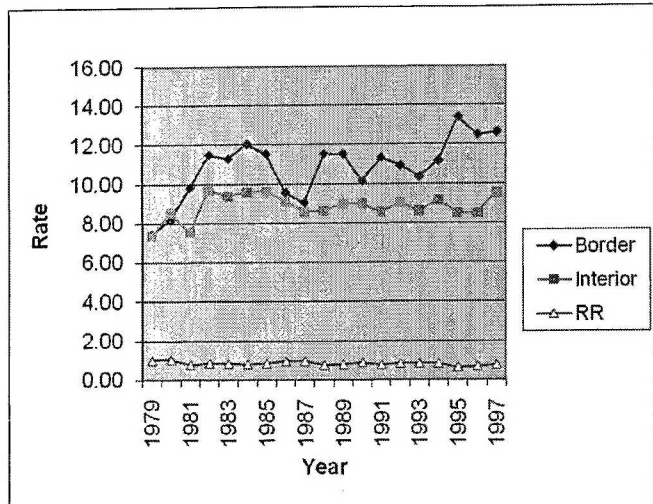
RR= risk ratio (interior/border), t-test = 6.37 (p=.0001)

Figure 2. Standardized mortality rates for diabetes per 100,000 interior versus border, 1979-1997



RR= Risk ratio (interior/border), t-test = 5.71 (p<.0001)

Figure 3. Standardized mortality rates for lung cancer per 100,000 interior versus border, 1979-1997



RR= Risk ratio (interior/border), t-test =  $-6.65$  ( $p < .0001$ )

# Shock to the System: Latino Political Trust, Pre- and Post-9/11

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## Abstract

Se examina el impacto de los ataques terroristas del 11 de septiembre de 2001 en la confianza en el gobierno reportada por latinos en el Valle del Rio Grande. Se encuentra que la confianza aumentó de manera significativa después de los ataques pero que esa alza fue transitorio. Además, utilizando un modelo Probit, se demuestra que el impacto de los ataques en la confianza se predijo con mayor significancia según el nivel de aculturación y el estatus migratorio del encuestado.

We examine the impact of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the trust in government reported by Latinos in the Rio Grande Valley. We first find that, although trust climbed significantly in the wake of the attacks, the increase was transitory. Second, using an ordered Probit model we find that the impact of the attacks on trust was predicted most strongly by the respondents' level of acculturation and immigration status.

Americans' trust in government is a standard topic among political researchers (Miller, 1974; Citrin, 1974; Citrin & Green, 1986; Cole, 1973; Erber & Lau, 1990; Hetherington, 1998; 1999; Michelson, 2001, 2003). This continuing interest over time is occasioned in part because trust in government has fluctuated over time (Alford, 2001). From our first measurement in the 1950's, trust in government first rose, peaking in the mid-1960s, then dropped precipitously into the mid-1970's, rising briefly in the mid-1980's, falling again in the mid-1990's, but beginning apparently to rise slowly after that (ANES, 1958-2000). Of course, this broad description can



mask the impact of short-term, dramatic forces which can move political trust. An obvious entry onto the list of dramatic forces which might be expected to affect levels of political trust are the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. When such shocks to the political system occur, there is a well known "rally round the flag" phenomenon (Hetherington & Nelson, 2003; Schlesinger, 2003; Edwards & Gallup, 1990), in which citizens express higher levels of support for the president, and trust in government, during a time of perceived crisis. Concerns about "big government" fade away as citizens turn to government for security. As Hetherington and Nelson (2003, 40) note, "the increased trust numbers that accompany a rally are a function of people evaluating government according to crisis-induced criteria, and the subsequent decrease results from people returning to their usual criteria."

9/11 is no exception to this general rule. Virtually all polls, regardless of the wording of the question, show an immediate leap in political trust subsequent to the 9/11 attacks. For example, the CNN/USA TODAY/Gallup poll of October, 2001 shows that 60% of respondents report trusting the government in Washington to do what is right just about always or most of the time, as compared to 42% expressing the same sentiments in July, 2000 (Polling Report 2002). The Washington Post poll, using the same question, finds an even greater change, with 30% of respondents providing trusting responses in April, 2000, and 64% doing so two weeks after the 9/11 attacks (Polling Report 2002).

This research provides another perspective on changes in political trust around this dramatic event. Here we take advantage of an opportunity to engage in a natural experiment, focusing on a particular population which might have been affected more directly by governmental reactions to the threats to security of Mexican Americans living in proximity to the international border between the U.S. and Mexico. Ethnic minorities are more likely to be targets of governmental attention or singled out for discrimination in such circumstances, so their levels of political trust are especially interesting in this context.

Even though Mexican Americans were not implicated in the 9/11 events, they were subject to harassment based on mistaken identity as well as their assumed immigrant status. A report by the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (2004) found that post 9/11,

Latinos have been subjected to increased racial profiling and abuse by government actors as well as being targets of increased vigilante activities. Also, documented cases of persecution have occurred. For example, two men in Lancaster, CA were arrested and imprisoned after they chased and beat a Hispanic man while shouting anti-Middle Eastern epithets (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2001). The scrutiny of persons crossing the U.S.-Mexican border intensified after 9/11, with a focus on Mexican immigrants and persons of Mexican descent. The Attorney General of one Southern state said, "You've got our borders being overrun in this country. I'm sure we're going to find that the major problem in South Carolina will be those of Mexican origin." (Quoted in National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, 2004.)

Given such experiences, we might expect that political trust among Latinos increased less, or decayed more quickly, than that of the general population. We address that question here, among others.

#### *Political Trust Among Mexican Americans*

Central to an understanding of the American political system in the 21st century is a picture of how minority groups, in general, and the Latino population, in particular, fit into the political system. Latinos' fit into the political system is particularly important given the rapid growth of the Latino population from approximately 9% to more than 12% of the population (McClain & Stewart, 2002, p. 29). The political significance of this population growth is greater than the large nationwide increase suggests: Latinos are an even stronger presence in a few key states, especially Florida, Texas, and California, than nationwide, magnifying the political importance of their growth in numbers. Some analysts see the increase of immigrants, especially Latino immigrants, as destructive of the essential American national identity. (For a particularly controversial example, see Huntington, 2004.)

Whatever the impact of Latinos on the American culture, it is clear that the American political process increasingly will be affected by the attitudes of this minority group toward the political system and the ways in which its members participate (or fail to participate) in it.

Broken down into racial/ethnic categories, research comparing political trust among Latinos, Anglos, and blacks is mixed. Research generally finds that Anglos are more trusting than African Americans; however the research on Latinos is more limited and somewhat conflicting (Michelson, 2003; de la Garza, 1992; Garcia 1973). Early socialization studies found lower levels of trust (Garcia, Lamare 1982). It would not be surprising to find that minorities are less trusting than the majority population given the sorts of experiences cited above. However, the Latino National Political survey (de la Garza, 1992) found relatively high levels of trust across three Latino national origin groups.

But what happens when a minority group becomes the majority in their community and political life? For one thing, majority status in one's community carries potential political clout. Thanks to reforms generated by the Voting Rights Act, majority-minority communities may elect their members to local political office and thereby reduce both the perception and reality of unequal political treatment, at least locally. Even if minority groups are not in the majority, the larger their numbers, the greater is their potential for political influence. Indeed, there is an important line of research that finds that political power (in the form of elected officials from their own minority group) empowers minorities and enhances their levels of political trust (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Emig, Hesse, & Fisher, 1996). Moreover, Latinos in majority-Latino districts are significantly more likely to turn out to vote than those in other districts, evidently due to the high probability of electing one of their own ethnic group (Barreto, Segura, & Woods 2004).

More broadly, in the absence of the ethnic persecution that followed the attacks of Sept. 11, the larger and more isolated a minority community, the less likely its members are to experience exposure to the majority culture; therefore, the less likely they are to assimilate. At low levels of assimilation, we might expect to find low levels of acquisition of attitudes, in this case, political cynicism, that predominate in the larger U.S. population. (See Michelson, 2001a, 2001b, 2003).

Discerning the impact of the 9/11 attacks on a large minority group is not easily done. Fortunately, questions about levels of political trust are standard in surveys that are regularly administered in the South Texas region. Thus, we are able to tap levels of political

trust in two surveys taken prior to 9/11 and two following 9/11. Data drawn from these studies provide an opportunity to ascertain the impact, if any, of such a dramatic event on levels of political trust among this population. We have conflicting expectations for the overall sample; living in a majority-Latino area should lead to a sense of political empowerment that enhances political trust; on the other hand, the backlash against Latinos, among other minority groups, in the wake of the attacks of Sept. 11, could have a negative impact on their political trust.

We have chosen for our analysis of political trust a set of counties that is overwhelmingly populated by Latinos and geographically isolated from counties in which a large Anglo population predominates. The population examined here lives in a four-county region in Texas that directly borders Mexico: Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties. The Latino share of the population in these counties ranges from 84% to 97.5%. In this setting, Spanish is widely spoken as the first and only language, a practice which, among other factors, impedes assimilation. We ask whether in such an environment, the relatively trusting attitudes with which Latinos enter the country are eroded over time, or whether the isolation of the Latino community (and the political empowerment that accompanies it) help to maintain political trust over time. Additionally, we ask whether the Sept. 11 backlash damaged Latinos' level of political trust in contrast to its effect on the general population. Our sampling method allows us to answer these questions.

## **Data and Methods**

Our data are from four surveys conducted in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Two surveys were done prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks; one during the fall of 2000 and one in the spring of 2001. The other two surveys were done after the events of September 11, 2001: One in November of 2001 and the other in August, 2002. It is important to note that these surveys were not panel studies, but rather independent cross-sectional samples. We analyze each survey independently, as well as a pooled sample.

Howell and Fagan (1988, p. 347) note the utility of using selected local samples in the testing of general theories of political behavior. We agree. Overall, this region is overwhelmingly comprised

of Mexican Americans (87%). It also is a traditional border region where the customs, traditions and influences of the neighboring country (Mexico) remain strong and continually reinforced. It is, perhaps, the most politically empowered region in the nation for Mexican Americans, with more than 90% of local elected city and county officials being of Mexican descent.

Each survey of residents was conducted by a random-digit dialing procedure. The survey frame included both Anglos and Latinos, with a substantial number of immigrants. A bilingual staff of interviewers trained by one of the authors conducted all surveys. The sample sizes ranged from 621 to 809. The characteristics of our samples appear to well resemble the socioeconomic characteristics of the population at large.

The dependent variable is composed of responses to the "Trust the government to do what is right" question from the National Election Studies. Following the example of Critin and Luks (2001) as well as Ulbig (2002), we chose not to use the standard NES battery of questions as a scale, rather relying upon this single item. The question was modeled after the formulation used by Hetherington (1998). In most of the analyses reported here, we use only responses from Latino respondents, reducing our samples to 465, 461, 262 and 485 respectively.

Previous research (Cole 1973; Michelson 2001a, 2001b, 2003) has identified several variables of importance in models of political trust, and we incorporate them into our analyses. These independent variables include immigration status, language used by the respondent, age, education, and income.

Immigration status is indicated by responses to the general question of where the respondent was born. We use only those respondents who were either born in Mexico or the United States; the few respondents from other countries were dropped from the analysis. We chose this formulation rather than generation because we wish to explicitly test the impact of immigration. Gilliam (1996) finds that non-native status for Mexican Americans is significantly related to positive attitudes toward a political leader.

Age and education are standard controls that have been found to correlate significantly with political trust in previous research (Cole 1973).

Other analyses have indicated the importance of the respondent's choice of language for political decision making. Johnson, Stein and Wrinkle (2003) indicate that choosing to speak a language other than English (in this case, Spanish) may represent an individual's access to social and community resources that enable, rather than impede, political participation – and, we suggest -- political trust. De la Garza, Falcon and Garcia's work (1996, 347) suggests that “... the foreign-born and Spanish dominant Mexican Americans are significantly more patriotic than Anglos.”

We also include a variable measuring length of residence in the region. Previous research has found that residential tenure is linked to potentially important psychological resources that facilitate individual connections to the community – community roots and social integration (Teixeira 1987, 1992; Miller 1992; Highton 2000). However, such connections may not have a positive impact on political trust. (See Uslaner & Conley, 2003). Michelson (2003, 922) argues that “the true driving force behind feelings of trust in government is acculturation” and that trust is eroded as acculturation increases. Thus, she argues, higher levels of cynicism among longer-term U.S. residents are a result of the “corrosive effect” that arises from “incorporation into the majority culture . . . or through extended exposure over time” (2001b, 11). To the extent that this is true, longer-term residents may not experience as large an immediate post-9/11 increase in trust as recent immigrants.

Our length of residence variable captures one aspect of exposure to the dominant culture; we expect it to have a negative impact on political trust. Choosing to speak Spanish in this region also may be taken as a lack of acculturation into the dominant culture; we expect that Spanish speakers will have higher levels of trust than English speakers. Thus, we expect that these two variables will reflect the impact of acculturation.

## **Findings**

Table 1 reports descriptive information concerning mean level of political trust (the most trusting response) by immigrant status in the four surveys. We include Anglos in this table for purposes of comparison. Latinos, especially immigrant Latinos, have higher levels of trust than do Anglos. Among Latinos, the native-born were less trusting than were immigrants. As can be seen in the table, the mean level of trust showed a major change in the surveys after 9/11.

## Table 1 About Here

In the first pre-9/11 survey, 34.2% of immigrants gave the most trusting response, while native-born Latinos had only an 11.6% response of trust. The Spring 2001 survey saw a slight reduction in immigrant levels of trust, while thenative-born remained about the same. In the immediate post 9/11 survey immigrant levels of trust soared to 51.4, more than double the spring, 2001 level, while native born trust increased to 17%, an increase of 63%. These increased levels of trust in the immediate post-9/11 period are congruent with the national experience. This pattern suggests that, for many Americans, the disruption caused by the events of 9/11 may alter their view of the government even if only temporarily.

To further examine the question of political trust, we pooled the data from all four surveys and performed an ordered logit regression. These results are reported in Table 2. As can be seen in the table, several variables are significant. As hypothesized, both immigrant status and language of interview were significant and in the expected direction. Immigrant Mexican Americans and those who responded to the interview in Spanish were more likely to give the most trusting response. There was a negative relationship between education and political trust. Length of residence was not significant.

To further examine the impact of the independent variables, we used CLARIFY (King, et. al. 2000; Tomz, et. al., 2003) to calculate the respondent's probabilities of giving the most and least trusting responses, depending on the time of the interview, immigration status and language of response. The results are reported in the table as the first difference in probabilities.

As can be seen in the table, the results highlight the importance of both immigration and language in explaining the increase in post 9/11 levels of trust. Immigrants, both English and Spanish speakers, had the highest increase post-9/11 of probability of being most trusting as well as the largest reductions in probability of being least trusting. In the aftermath of 9/11 immigrants virtually doubled their probability of giving the most trusting response.

One interesting aspect of this table is the decline of trust from the Fall of 2000 survey to the Spring 2001 survey. All groups,

with the exception of native-born Spanish speakers experienced marked declines in trust over this period. Of course, the 2001 Spring survey was conducted in the aftermath of one of the most divisive and questionable elections in American history. We suspect a possible connection between these declines in trust and the controversy surrounding the 2000 election<sup>2</sup>.

Finally, we find no evidence of a negative impact on political trust of the post-9/11 targeting of Latinos for ethnically-based persecution. If there were such an effect, we might expect to see it in a comparison of the results of the Spring 2001 and Summer 2002 surveys. That is because during the months between the Sept. 11 attacks and the Summer 2002 survey, there would have been ample time for respondents to become aware of any persecution. Yet, Table 3 indicates that for all groups examined, the probability of giving the most trusting response, although lower than the initial response, was higher in the summer of 2002 than in the spring of 2001.

## **Conclusion**

Political trust is a malleable aspect of our political lives. Significant events such as 9/11 that shock the American political community can and do influence America's level of political trust. This paper indicates that for Mexican-Americans, the events of 9/11 had, as they did for most Americans, an influence – if temporary – on levels of political trust. The heightened level of trust found post 9/11 may be more of a “Rally Around the Flag” phenomenon, but it illustrates the response that events such as 9/11 can evoke in our political community. While it may yet be too soon to know if the events of 9/11 have fundamentally altered the political trust of the nation's largest minority, our data suggest that they have not. Mexican Americans, like other Americans, increased their levels of trust in the government following those tragic events. However, these levels of trust have since moderated. These data also support the distinctiveness of the foreign born and Spanish speakers among Mexican-Americans noted by de la Garza, Falcon and Garcia (1996) and Michelson (2003). Not all minorities are the same, and the differences within the minority community merit careful attention.

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<sup>2</sup> While this is an interesting phenomenon, it is not the main focus of our inquiry. Future research might investigate the impact of such election controversies in more detail.



Further, our findings support the corrosive nature of exposure to American society found by Michelson (2001a, 2003). One measure of exposure to the American political system – length of residence in the U.S. – was not a significant predictor of giving a trusting response. Three others, however, language of interview, immigrant status, and education exert strong influences on trust. English speakers, the native born and the better educated are less likely to exhibit high levels of trust and substantially more likely to exhibit low levels of trust. It may be that simple exposure to the political system, as measured by length of residence, is not sufficient to lower levels of trust. The relatively high level of political trust among immigrants and those with strong ties to their ethnic community (as measured by language use) may be a result of living in an empowered ethnic community, one that is dominated by co-ethnics. But those who are likely to have experienced more exposure to the dominant culture outside these heavily Latino counties – more educated, native-born, English speaking Latinos – tend to have the lowest levels of trust.

Further, our data suggest that those who fear that increased Latino immigration into the United States will cause an erosion in support for American institutions (see Huntington, 2004) are incorrect. Mexican immigrants are more likely to “rally around the flag” than are native born Mexican Americans or Anglos.

Table 1  
Most Trusting Response for Government to Do What is Right

DATE	ANGLO	NATIVE LATINO	IMMIGRANT LATINO
FALL 2000 (Pre 9/11)	5.9%	11.6%	34.2%
SPRING 2001 (Pre 9/11)	10.3%	10.7%	25.8%
FALL 2001 (Post 9/11)	19.7%	17.0%	54.7%
SUMMER 2002 (Post 9/11)	8.3%	11.4%	39.4%

Table 2. A Pooled Analysis of Trust Among Latinos

Clarify- First Difference  
In predicted probabilities

independent variable	estimated coefficient <sup>a</sup>	Std. Error	least trusting (max-min)	most trusting (max-min)
Spanish Speaker	.32*	.13	-.08	.04
Immigrant	.38**	.12	-.10	.05
Income 01	.01	.04	-.02	.
Education	-.12*	.05	.14	-.06
Age	.00007	.003	.012	-.001
Log of Years lived in the Rios Grande Valley	-.03	.07	.025	-.013
Fall 00	.43***	.13		
Fall 01	.09	.13		
Summer 02	-.36**	.14		
Cut one	.10	.25		
Cut two	1.74	.26		

<sup>a</sup> Coefficients are maximum likelihood ( ordered logit) estimates

Number of observations	1672
LLR(chi-squared w/10 d.f.)	71.85****
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.02

\*Significant at .05

\*\*Significant at .01

\*\*\*Significant at .001

\*\*\*\*Significant at .0001

Table 3. Immigration Status, Language Preference and Trust in Government among Latinos

Native Born Immigrant				
	English Speaker		Spanish Speaker	
	Least Trusting	Most Trusting	Least Trusting	Most Trusting
Fall 2000 34 Pre9/11	.49 .27	.16 .27	.42 .33	.21 .21
Spring 2001 53 Pre9/11	.59 .16	.13 .38	.43 .27	.23 .23
Fall 2001 27 Post 9/11	.45 .33	.18 .15	.28 .51	.32 .32
Summer 2002 43 Post 9/11	.57 .24	.15 .26	.38 .40	.28 .28

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# The Regional Institutionalization of the Texas Rio Grande Valley

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El propósito de este artículo es identificar y examinar aquellos fenómenos que pudieran definir la institucionalización del Valle del Bajo Río Grande de Texas. Su localización en la frontera de Estados Unidos con México constituye el contexto para el análisis de los eventos históricos y geográficos, nacionales e internacionales, así como de sus protagonistas, que han tenido impacto en el desarrollo y la identidad regional. El estudio de la institucionalización de esta región proveerá un marco de referencia para el entendimiento de los contextos histórico, social, cultural y político todavía evidentes en una región cuya identidad se encuentra en permanente desarrollo.

Un selecto grupo de conceptos teóricos guiarán el descubrimiento y definición de los procesos de institucionalización.

The purpose of this article is to identify and examine the phenomena that could define the institutionalization of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The location of the LRGV along the U.S. border with Mexico provides a context for the analysis of historical, geographical, national, and international events which together with their actors have had an impact on the development and regional identity of the LRGV. The analysis of the institutionalization of this region will provide a framework for the understanding of the social, cultural, political, and historical contexts that continue to be evident in a region whose identity is in perennial development. A select group of theoretical concepts will guide the discovery and definition of the processes of institutionalization.

## **Introduction**

The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, seen as Figure 1, represents the easternmost geographic point of the border between the United States and Mexico that spans over two thousand miles from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean to the west. According to Richardson (1999), "international borders often create unusual



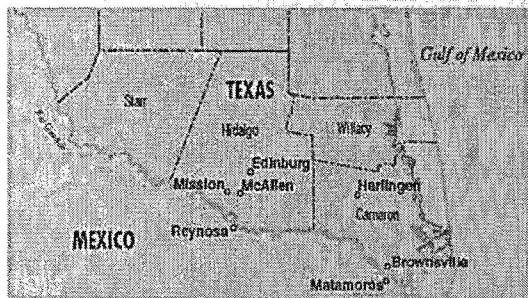
situations. Few situations are more unusual than the one on the southern end of the Texas-Mexico border. This region, a frequently disputed territory in the past has emerged as neither fully American nor fully Mexican" (p. xiii). Miller (1989) shares a similar perspective when he observes that,

The border has come to represent many things to many people, yet it remains the most misunderstood region of North America. Our southern frontier is not simply American on one side and Mexican on the other. It is a third country with its own identity. This third country is a strip two thousand miles long and no more than twenty miles wide. It obeys its own laws and has its own outlaws, its own police officers, and its own policy makers. Its food, its language, its music are its own. Even its economic development is unique. It is a colony unto itself, long and narrow and ruled by two faraway powers. (p. xiii-xiv)

This region presents a useful case study as unique as that which Harvey (2006) used to analyze the various spatial scales of Canada's regions, their histories and their separate identities. While not as geographically expansive as Quebec, the Rio Grande Valley does share a common element with Harvey's analysis of Quebec; that being the historical and present dispersion of its population. There is, however, one distinction between Harvey's historical analysis of regions within Quebec and this analysis of the Rio Grande Valley; the regions that Harvey (2006) described are all within Canada and none about an independent nation, as does the Rio Grande Valley.

Figure 1.

Rio Grande Valley



Source: Federal Reserve Bank (2007)  
Dallas, Texas

The theoretical constructs of Finnish geographer Annasi Paasi (1986) were applied by Harvey (2006) to his study of the development of regional identity in Canada, specifically in the Province of Quebec. Paasi's theoretical framework also serves as the primary guide here for determining the essential elements that define the institutionalization of the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley. The resulting analysis, of how the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley, with the Rio Grande as its nexus, has become a critical link to the future development of the transborder region that separates Mexico and the United States of America, is a key component of this paper. Paasi's (1986) theory consists of four stages: 1) The assumption of territorial shape; 2) the formation of conceptual (symbolic) shape; 3) the formation of institutional shape; and 4) the establishment of an entity in the regional system and social consciousness of the society. (p.105)

According to Paasi (1986), the order of these stages can vary as they relate to concrete regions in a society. Paasi observes that institutionalization of a region "is a process during which some specific level of the spatial structure becomes an established entity which is defined in different spheres of social action and consciousness and which is continually reproduced in individual and institutional practices (e.g. economic, political, legal, educational, cultural, etc)" (p.110). The institutionalization of regional spaces appears to Harvey (2006) "as a process in constant evolution over time involving different social actors"(p. 79).

In his analysis of intra-provincial regions of Quebec, Harvey (2006) put forth five groups of actors that are present in the modeling and remodeling of the regional representation of the population. These actors are: 1) government, at all levels; 2) regional actors of civil society who intervene as leaders of associations, organizations, or regional movements; 3) national and regional media; 4) writers and artists; and finally, 5) academics (geographers, historians, sociologists, economists, and other regional specialists).

Harvey (2006) emphasizes that the regional analysis approach is essential for the interpretation of a country's economic, political and cultural past as well as its future. This article is also a response to Harvey's recommendation that at, "the North American level, an analysis that compares the process of regional institutionalization on different scales and according to different historical, political and

administrative modes appear necessary in the context of the increasing integration brought on by the NAFTA treaty. Following the example set by the regions of Europe, it is possible that certain regions of Canada, the United States and Mexico develop together direct economic or cultural relations without necessarily involving nation-states" (p. 91).

Both Harvey (2006) and Paasi (1986) stress the importance of history as an essential element for understanding how regional identities evolve within a nation. Harvey also proposed that, "the size of institutionalized regions may also vary considerably; from a village and surrounding area to a county, to a province" (p. 79).

The actors that Harvey identified in Quebec are also present, to a degree, in the Texas Rio Grande Valley. However, others have surfaced from the historical, economic, political and cultural relationships between communities on both sides of the Texas-Mexican border that is the Rio Grande. The analysis presented here will result in a context that identifies those actors that are key players in the development of this region's institutionalization as envisioned by Paasi (1986).

### **The Historical Implications of Geography, International Treaties, Violence, and Demographics on the Institutionalization of the Rio Grande Valley**

According to Connor (1971, p. 1-7), the Rio Grande was the result of over two hundred and fifty million years of geological development that created a water flow which begins at the peaks of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. Connor's describes the source of water because, "the entire surface of the state tilts slightly to the east and south, the major drainage systems spill from West Texas to the Gulf of Mexico. The Rio Grande, annually freshened by melting snow from the mountains of Colorado and New Mexico, flows restlessly along the boundary between Texas and Mexico..." (p. 6). This geological phenomenon has become the nexus for conquest, revolution, war, international treaties, violence, the source of a transnational culture, the baseline for international commerce and the source of identity for Mexican American citizens who share a river with their close relatives on the south side of the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo to Mexicans).

Riley (1999) claims that, "the Rio Grande Valley, with its great potential irrigation agriculture and its rich bottomlands, was home in 1492 to a large number of towns, many of them quite sizable" (p. 49). These natural assets were to be a source of conflict later in this region's history as competing economics and cultures met at a juncture in this region in the nineteenth century.

After the Texas Revolution in the 1830's, Texas became an independent nation. It was then annexed by the United States in 1845. This action by the United States aggravated the Mexican government and an additional point of contention was the claim by the United States that the Rio Grande and not the Nueces River, as claimed by Mexico, was to be the new southern border (Montejano, 1987; Martinez, 1994; Saldívar, 2006; Arreola, 2002).

Montejano (1987) refers to a map of the Texas Republic, which he claims, "emphasizes the Rio Grande in defining the shape of Texas, the map of cattle trails to Kansas points to the development of market connections for the Texas cattle industry..." (p. 9). This map was drawn fully a decade before the beginning of the Mexican War. According to Montejano (1987) there were many factors: land-hungry frontiersmen, slave holding interests, the belief in Manifest Destiny as well as commercial interests (comerciantes) for the instigation of war by the United States against Mexico. He goes on to emphasize that, "the commercial importance of the Rio Grande did not lie simply with the distant Santa Fe trade. What is usually overlooked but which proved to be as critical and more directly related to the outbreak of hostilities, was the port trade of Matamoros on the lower end of the Rio Grande" (p. 16). Montejano also claims that, "the strategic importance of the Rio Grande was well understood by the leaders of the Texas Republic. Here was a river that could link the rich commerce of northern Mexico, from Santa Fe to San Luis Potosi, with world markets; a river that could rival the Mississippi as the most important trade route of the continent" (1987. p. 18).

The Mexican War ended in 1848, with the United States as the victor, and the resultant Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and the Gadsden Purchase of 1853 made the Rio Grande the southern border of Texas. These international treaties essentially created a new American, the Mexican nationals who resided in the conquered territories (Montejano, 1988; Saldívar, 2006; Sharp, 1998).

These new citizens were to be guaranteed their civil and property rights. This is also the beginning of the Texas/American historical origins of Mexican Americans, the Tejanos, and the baseline for the history to gauge the Rio Grande Valley's institutionalization.

According to Cadaval (2007) the Rio Grande became, "a symbol of separation in Texas" (p.5). Cadaval (2007) furthermore believes that, "this particular historical development has made the border the planet's longest between a country characterized by economic practices sometimes known as "first-world" and a country whose economy is sometimes characterized as "third-world". The growth of a capitalist economy provided the context for the development not only of a U.S.-Mexico border culture, but also of other types of cultural processes that incorporate differences: acculturation, creolization, and the growth of various cultural diasporas" (p. 2).

The end of the Mexican War was the beginning of the Diasporas of the Mexican American and its major catalyst was violence. The period from about 1848 to the early twentieth century as one during which Anglo Texans asserted their right to the conquered territories along the Rio Grande and took retribution by seizing both land and other property from the Mexican Americans according to De León (2004), Anderson (2005), Montejano (1987), Vargas (1999) and Young (2004). Vargas (1999) claims, "much of the violence against Mexicans in the 1870s occurred along the Texas-Mexican border. Robbery, land and cattle theft, and murder marked the region" (p. 177). Vargas (1999) also provides references from the Mexico's Comision Pesquisadora (Investigative Commission) that discussed the Cart War of 1857 and other incidents of violence and reveals the desperate situation of the current Mexican population of South Texas (p. 177).

Vargas (1999) claims that, "...during the disorganization that was prolonged by and after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, robberies, spoliations of lands were perpetrated by parties of armed Americans. It is not extraordinary to find some of them whose only titles consist of having taken possession of and settled upon lands belonging to Mexicans. After the spoliations, there came the legal forms and all of the sources of a complicated legislation" (p. 178).

The response to the violence against Mexican Americans along the Rio Grande led to a violent retribution by several individuals whose names and actions are the subject of corridos, ballads and folk songs. Among the two, most notables were Juan "Cheno" Cortina and Catarino Garza. Both Anderson (2005) and De León (2002) provide accounts of the Cortina rebellion against Anglo Americans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in 1859. Cortina's armed attacks against Brownsville, Texas were instigated by a feud with the local marshal; or were indeed a rebellion against the Anglo community in south Texas. Whichever the case, Cortina did assault Brownsville in September of 1859, killed three Texans and did indeed issue a proclamation, as noted by Anderson (2005) to his fellow Tejanos to unite and fight the Anglo-Texans. He reminded them that, "many of you have been robbed of your property, incarcerated, chased, murdered and hunted like wild beasts..." (p. 322). Cortina's rebellion failed due to superior Texan forces of Texas Rangers and militia and Anderson (2005) assesses this event as, "a tragic affair bred of racial hatred, distrust and lawlessness of the sort that the culture of violence in Texas consistently bred" (p. 323).

Garza presents an interesting transnational rebel leader in that his 1891 revolt, according to Young (2004) was, "directed against Diaz [the president/dictator of Mexico] but in practice the Garzistas organized and ended up fighting most of their battles on Texas soil against U.S. authorities. Thus, what was ostensibly a political struggle in Mexico also expressed Mexican-American tensions in Texas over land and political power... When the Garzistas turned their guns on the U.S. military and the Texas Rangers, they were in part venting their frustrations at being dispossessed by Anglos" (p. 20). Young (2004) makes reference to, "the practice of walking or swimming across the border, smuggling contraband, maintaining family ties and keeping up on politics in both countries created an alternative reality to that imposed by the treaty makers and cartographers" (p. 21). These practices, according to Young (2000), evident in the pre-Border Patrol era, fueled the flames of discontent and sometime rebellion such as that of Garza, and are present in today's transborder region.

The extension of violence as a means to disenfranchise the Mexican Americans in south Texas was also evident during the early twentieth century. Cadaval (2007) claims that, "when economic recessions hit the United States, efforts were mounted to push

immigrants back to Mexico. In 1914-1915, the U.S. side of the Rio Grande Valley experienced a winter of violence when hundreds of Mexicans, or "Mexicanos" in border usage, were persecuted and killed by the Texas border patrols" (p. 6).

Anderson (2005) provides another insight of how violence has been an official and unofficial policy practice by those in power to deny ethnic communities their due rights when he refers explain that: Recent studies in Yugoslavia and elsewhere reveal that political elites often direct the actions of paramilitary groups involved in ethnic cleansing. The situation was similar in Texas, where politicians supported Texas Ranger units that became the agents of ethnic cleansing. Rangers did act occasionally on their own, and politicians found them difficult if not, at times, impossible to control. Nevertheless, many politicians in the state had been Rangers, and the paramilitary groups that forced removal or committed the occasional genocidal act were an extension of the Texas political system. Anglo political elites likewise encouraged a great distrust of "the other" (which could be Indians or Tejanos). (p.7)

The hatred generating violence that was perpetrated on the Mexican Americans by the Texas Rangers is described by Chance and Kearney (2006). Chance and Kearney take a leap forward over nearly 100 years, from the early twentieth century to present day to present a relationship between the roles of the Texas Rangers and the evolution of the Minutemen. The question is posed by Chance and Kearney has a bearing on the treatment of the issue here. They ask, "Why is the subject of Ranger violence in the Valley during this era [*post Mexican War*] important to Texans? A great many Valley Hispanics can recite with bitterness some act of murder, violence or injustice committed against a family member by the hated "Rinches", generic term used to denote any law enforcement officer, member of a posse or vigilante. Valley Tejanos also point to the written history of this region of the state as a bunch of Anglo lies" (p. 176).

The presence of a vigilante group, such as the Minutemen, who purport to protect the borderlands from drug trafficking, human smuggling and illegal immigration, presents a challenge to a region that has been historically involved in such issues. Chance and Kearney (2006) comment that, "on the other hand, while the Minutemen are not law enforcement personnel, their activities have

been perceived as Ranger-like efforts intended to intimidate Hispanics. Just the Texas Rangers, the Minutemen have also been accused of racist motives" (p. 172).

These incidents of violence and confrontation over land, power and resources, in a small region, fall within what Paasi (1991) perceives as being evident within a cultural context. He explains that, "the struggles between diverse groups and aggregates over the allocation of resources and power are no means limited to strictly economic and political issues, but extend to cultural ones and opposing ways of life" (p. 241).

The historical demographic shifts in the Rio Grande Valley are also a contributing factor to the transformation of the social and cultural imagery of the region since its annexation by the United States. Montejano (1987) refers to an estimate by a journalist for the New York Times, Fredrick Olmsted, that approximately 25,000 Mexicans were in the state and about 5,500 were in region from Laredo to the Rio Grande Valley in 1850 (p.31). The comparable estimate for Anglo Texans, for the same period, was for approximately 120,000 above the Nueces River and less than 3,000 south of this river. While no data has been found for the period from 1850 to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Arreola's (2002) analysis of data from the 1910 U.S. Census Bureau identified 135,232 Mexicans south of the Nueces River and by 1990 the total rose to 1,741,685 for the same region.

Acevedo (2008) provides data from an analysis of the mid-decade report of the U.S. Census Bureau that show that in the year 2000 Census there were 978,369 residents in the four counties of the Rio Grande Valley. The data, in 2007, demonstrates a net increase of 224,227 residents to 1,202,956 residents or an approximate increment of 18.6% (American Communities Survey, 2007). Of the 2007 population, 89% (1,070,630) is Mexican American. The remainder represents less than 2% other than White, leaving a balance of 9% White population. The population density, by one ethnic group, in such a small region, makes it the largest such concentration in any region of Texas.

This demographic data is important to an understanding of the phenomena that is being presented and reviewed in this paper. The data essentially involved two ethnic groups: Whites and



Mexican Americans and on a very small scale, Native Americans. It was not a diverse experience by any stretch of the imagination.

### **The Theoretical Frameworks: Application to the Rio Grande Valley**

Maxwell (1996) believes that a researcher must have a "conceptual context" to guide a study and he defines this context as, "a system of concepts, expectations, beliefs and theories that support and inform your research..." (p. 25). He also refers to the works of Miles and Huberman (1994) who provide the following guidance, "the most important thing to understand about your conceptual context is that it is a formulation of what you think is going on with the phenomena you are studying—a tentative theory of what is happening and why" (p. 25). Maxwell's last admonishment is that, "your conceptual context is a theory, what is sometimes called the theoretical framework for the study" (p.25).

Paasi's theory provides the initial and recurring framework, through its four variables, for this paper. Harvey's (2006) application to the study of regional institutionalization in Quebec, Canada is used as a source of comparison and guidance. The result of studying the work of Paasi and Harvey resulted in this question: Do historical and present phenomena demonstrate the Rio Grande Valley's regional institutionalization according to Paasi's theoretical construct? This question follows Paasi's (1991) hypothesis that, "during its institutionalization, a region achieves a specific *identity*, which cannot be reduced, as humanistic geographers tend to do, to the regional consciousness (regional identity) of the people living there. Instead it is more useful to link it to the institutionalization process, which includes the production and reproduction of regional consciousness in the inhabitants (and other people outside the region) and material and symbolic features of the region as parts of the ongoing process of social reproduction" (p. 244).

Additional perspectives, about regional development, have been reviewed as a guide to study and understand Paasi. Some of these were from Garfield (1991), Gilbert (1988) and the concepts of "Third Space" by Saldívar (2007), Soja (1989), Martinez (1994) and Gutierrez (1999) informed the process of discovery and analysis of phenomena. Paasi's four stages of regional institutionalization are addressed individually as a means to determine if the Rio Grande

Valley is indeed engaged in the social experience that results in its present and evolving identity. The product is a proposed theoretical construct to augment and expand Paasi's theoretical framework that is addressed in the balance of this narrative.

### ***Assumption of territorial shape***

Paasi (1991) views this first stage as, the localization of social practices (for example, economy, politics, and administration) through which the regional transformation takes place and a region achieves its boundaries and will be identified as a distinct unit in the spatial structure...Power relations manifested in political, administrative or bureaucratic, economic, and symbolic practices play a crucial role in the emergence of territorial shape-the very term territory carries a connotation of geographical space and power. (p. 245)

This is a region whose geographic boundaries Spaniards defined, according to Arreola (2002), in the sixteenth century and by Native Americans long before the coming of Europeans. Arreola also proposes that, "this was the land over which several Spanish entradas or overland explorations marched across the Rio Grande and South Texas during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century" (p. 11). Arreola (2002) states that, "...Texans, according to one distinguished geographer, are said to maintain a "perpetual image" of South Texas as a directional region, and at least one prominent Mexican American historian has labeled the region between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande the "Tejano cultural zone" (p.10). Montejano (1987, p. 31) again refers to the observations of Fredrick Law Olmsted, the New York Times reporter, who called the newly acquired territory, the "Mexican border frontier." Arreola (2002) also uses an observation by Olmsted about the Rio Grande borderlands which he described as, "a region so sterile and valueless, as to be commonly reputed a desert, and being incapable of settlement, serves as a barrier-separating the nationalities, and protecting from encroachment, at least temporarily, the retreating race" (p. 13).

While achieving its geographic boundaries, the Rio Grande Valley also became a destination for the intrusion of White settlers, lawyers, "comerciantes" and vigilantes, ranchers, claim jumpers, politicos, bandits, rebels, and land speculators (Montejano, 1987),

Arreola (2002), Martinez (1994), Richardson (1999) and Anderson (2005).

The formalization of regional governance by the Texas legislature during the late eighteenth and early twentieth century has created a region that essentially replicated the governmental structure of all regions of the state. What is significant for the assertion of political, administrative and bureaucratic structure; is the dominance of the Mexican American in regional governmental elected positions throughout the Rio Grande Valley since the end of the "patrón" political system in the mid-1960's with the rise of the Chicano movement.

The patrón system had been, according to Arreola (2002) was, a semi-feudal arrangement derived from Hispanic colonial roots. The patrón was a political overlord who controlled ranch peonesthrough social and economic patronage. In the early twentieth century, this system survived almost exclusively in South Texas where Anglo and Mexican American bosses like Jim Wells, Archie Parr, and Manuel Guerra built county-based political machines on the foundation of the older Hispanic ranching system. (p. 191)

The rise of what may be called the modern equivalent of Political Action Committees (PACs), such as the politically moderate League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in 1929, and the G.I. Forum in the 1950's, eventually led to the evolution of the slightly more radical Chicano Movement in the 1960's. Collectively these political organizations were a hybrid of non-government agencies (NGO's) and community based organizations (CBO's). Regardless of their political leaning, these organizations were instrumental in the development of a political conscience and an expanded participation in the electoral process. This expanded participation is known for adding more voters to registration rosters through the efforts of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP) and getting more Mexican American elected to political offices in the Rio Grande Valley and south Texas. (Zaragoza, 1999)

The Valley Partnership (2006) in its roster of elected public officials from the Rio Grande Valley provides data that show that of the seven members of Congress 6 are Mexican-American. The data also show that all seven members of the Texas state legislature

are Mexican American; that thirty of the forty-three mayors are Mexican-American, that 90% of the school members of the thirty-one school districts are Mexican Americans, and twenty-seven Mexican American superintendents lead these districts.

It is necessary to reiterate Paasi's criteria for the assumption of territorial shape to confirm that the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley has met the standard that, "power relations manifested in political, administrative or bureaucratic, economic practices play a crucial role in the emergence of territorial shape-the very term territory carries a connotation of geographical space and power" (p. 245).

### ***Formation of conceptual (symbolic) shape and the emergence of institutions***

Paasi (1986), proposes that,

The second and third stages in the present framework are in reality simultaneous aspects of the same process, as the emergence of institutions is naturally linked with the increasing employment of the name and other territorial symbols and signs of the region. The expansion of the number of institutions, beginning to maintain the image of the region, and the criteria for the identity among the inhabitants is hence of crucial importance for the reproduction of regional consciousness. The development of institutions refers here not only the formal establishment (e.g. mass media, educational) but also local or non-local practices of which the regional unit concerned attains a specific name, social organizations and institutions which are linked with it through their identification apparatus (territorial symbolism) faction and and/or areas of influence (market areas for instance). These proportionally serve to strengthen the significance and role of territorial symbols and signs and in this way influence the identity of the region and the potential "feeling of togetherness" among its inhabitants. (p. 126)

It is proposed, that the Rio Grande, because of its location and impact on the social experience of people on its south and north side is the umbilical cord to the assumption of territorial shape for the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley. According to Metz

(1989), "the Spanish explorers originally believed that the Rio Grande were different streams. They called it the *Rio Grande* (Great, or Big, River), *Rio de las Palmas* (River of Palms-as seen from the Gulf) and *Rio Bravo del Norte* (Bold, or Wild, River of the North). In Mexico it is still called the *Rio Bravo*" (p. 293). The name of the region is to Paasi (1991), an essential symbol, "which connects its image with regional consciousness" (p. 245). He also contends that, "the production and reproduction of the symbolic significance of regions depends crucially on the communication-based involvement of individuals in various practices" (p. 245).

The use of language as a producer and disseminator of symbols is also an important consideration here, when one evaluates the impact of Spanish usage in its various forms as a means to maintain personal and social identity in the Rio Grande Valley. According to the U.S. Bureau (2007), 82% of the residents of the Rio Grande Valley speak Spanish instead of English in their domestic settings. An additional language phenomenon, to consider, is the use of Spanglish, a hybrid of Spanish and English. One of its derivatives, code switching and how it is used to convey an affinity with another individual from within the same social or cultural circle is addressed by Koivisto (1998). Koivisto refers to an observation by Dr. Antonio Zavaleta, an anthropologist at the University of Texas Brownsville, "that true code switching-with no interruption in thought-takes more than simply knowing both languages. It is a result of living in an environment like the Texas-Mexican border where Spanish and English have meshed since the 1800's. Spanglish is a cultural foundation, a sense of ownership and place, to facilitate a person to switch off the languages" (1998, p. 6). Mejias and Anderson (1998), in their analysis of the use of Spanish in South Texas concluded first, that there is an attitude and orientation toward the use of Spanish and secondly that,

The Mexican American sample shows us that Spanish is a language related not only to interpersonal communication in a private domain (home), but also related to public understanding as a means of indispensable daily communication in the Rio Grande Valley. Since Spanish has been seen predominantly as a means of communication, we hypothesize that we will see its maintenance along with English in the Rio Grande Valley rather than a shift to English. (p. 406)

Paasi (1986) refers to the importance of language, as a key moderator in a region's identity, when he explains that,

in everyday discourse language is a significant apparatus for social classification between different groups and classes in the local "language market", while in terms of the collective role expressed in the structure of expectations, language turns out to be of importance for socio-spatial classification, especially in the case of "their" region. Dialects, for the instance, are popularly thought of as collective, region-bound features, as they transcended the effects of social differentiation in society. (p. 123)

Gilbert (1988) reaffirms Paasi by her observation that, "members of a regional group would be linked through specific a communication process which would enhance their collective way of thinking about places and space" (p. 211).

The development of institutions is another affirmation of institutionalization, that is evident in the Rio Grande Valley. According to Paasi (1986), two such institutions are those affiliated with educational development and those associated with mass media that may influence any relationships with market areas. An essential element of the Rio Grande Valley's identity is higher education that contributes to the intellectual and knowledge capital of the region. The expansion of higher education opportunities, in south Texas, did not evolve as a policy of Texas higher education but rather because of continued legal challenges to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board by this community. Sharp (1998) provides a summary of the legal challenges initiated by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) to correct the inequities in South Texas higher education.

These legal challenges led to the adoption of the South Texas/Border Initiative in 1989. This initiative resulted in the merger of Pan American University with the University of Texas System; the establishment of a University of Texas campus at Brownsville in South Texas. The Texas A&M System created the Texas A&M University branch campus in Corpus Christi (formerly Corpus Christi State University), made Texas A&I University a branch campus of Texas A&M and merged Laredo State University to create Texas A & M International University. In 1993 South Texas College was

founded in McAllen, Texas and is now has the largest student enrollment of any institution of higher education in South Texas. These institutions are a critical component of this region's economic development and the lead drivers for the social and cultural life of their constituencies.

The role of mass media is another important factor in the development of this region's identity. Deeken (2008) claims that television is the major media of influence of the region's predominately bilingual population. There are eight Spanish language television stations either in the Rio Grande Valley or in proximity in northern Mexico. There are also three daily newspapers in this region and two have Spanish language supplements such as McAllen's Monitor, which publishes La Frontera, the Brownsville's Herald which publishes El Nuevo Herald. In addition there are stand-alone daily and weekly Spanish newspaper such as El Periodico USA and El Rumbo del Valle. The region does have access to English only newspapers such as USA Today, the major dailies from Houston, Austin, Corpus Christi and Dallas as well as the New York Times. Accordingly, Paasi (1986) subscribes to the importance of newspapers by his observation that, "the mass media of the regions and especially the newspapers, which bear strong economic ties with market areas, are normally significant for regional consciousness" (p. 129).

Institutions have a vital role in the development of a sense of identity in relation to territory and this is very noticeable when one scans the Internet for the use of the term "Rio Grande Valley" in government, business, social or cultural initiatives. The website of the Rio Grande Valley Partnership (2008) refers to over sixty-six organizations or institutions that use the term Rio Grande Valley as either part of their name or as part of their description of services or locale. The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (2008) provides Internet links to over seventy agencies or organizations that acknowledge an affiliation with this region.

The data does show that the Rio Grande Valley has established those institutions that Paasi (1991) considers as essential to the development and reproduction of regional consciousness.

***Establishment of an entity in the regional system and social consciousness of the society***

In the fourth stage of his institutionalization theory, Paasi (1991) posits that it results in the,

Continuation of the institutionalization process after the region has an established, albeit not necessarily administrative, status in the spatial structure and social consciousness of society. This stage is in fact a cross-section of the institutionalization process in which the region is gradually shaped and reproduced during the transformation of the society. The territorial unit is now "ready" to be taken into use in "place marketing" or as a weapon in an ideological struggle over resources and power, for example, in regional policy or the ideology of regionalism within society. Cultural implications can be seen in the 'North-South' dichotomies prevailing in various countries. (p. 247)

Harvey (2006), in his study of the regions of Quebec, contended that, "now more than ever, individuals need to connect to their area and to develop a sense of place" (p. 91). This perspective is based on Harvey's assessment that, "in many areas of Canada and other countries, notably in Europe, we have seen the development of direct international relations between various cities or regions while before, these relations were the sole preserve of national capitals or metropolitan center" (p. 91). What has become evident, in this analysis of the Rio Grande Valley, is that the dichotomies of regionalism do fall with the 'North-South' sphere that Paasi (1991) subscribes but present a transnational, rather than an intra-national experience. The "North" here is the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley and the "South" is northern Mexico.

The transformation of the residents of the Rio Grande Valley, especially the predominately Mexican American, is one that is grounded in a historical "place" which Martinez (1994) refers to as the "borderlands" (p. 25). To understand the institutionalization of the Rio Grande Valley, one must understand this phenomena, within the context of the borderlands experience which Martinez (1994) describes as,

a variability that is deeply rooted in the phenomena of duality. The border is predictable and unpredictable; it divides and unifies; it repels and attracts; it obstructs and facilitates. In a bipolar environment, it is not surprising that border society manifests such contrary tendencies as conflict and accommodation, poverty and wealth, social



rigidity and fluidity, racial animosity and tolerance, and cultural separation and fusion. Mexico pulls from one direction and the United States from the other, and while the border exerts a force to separate the two national systems, it also generates a power to bring them together... Transnational borderlanders, however thrive on cross-border interaction, building bridges that sustain the symbiosis starkly evident in the twin city complexes along the boundary. People with strong ethnic, cultural, or economic links with the other side are the ones most profoundly affected by such ties because they promote intimate association between two national identities. That orientation is the essence of people categorized as core borderlanders, these transnationals who most exemplify the way of life in the borderlands milieu and who are most involved in overcoming barriers posed by political and human divisions. (p. 305)

This is the crucial point of departure between the regional institutionalization process as proposed by Paasi and the reality of how it is demonstrated in the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley. A critical intervening variable here is that 25% of the residents of the Rio Grande are foreign born, mostly from Mexico (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). This region's demography will continue to expand because of immigration and children birth (Murdock, Hoque, Michael, White and Pecotte, 1995). Paasi's four theoretical constructs have been applied to geographic, historical events, international treaties and demographic phenomena in the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley. The data and experience of the mostly Mexican American residents of this region validate the institutionalization of this region. However, there are additional elements to consider as other theoretical constructs are proposed to augment Paasi's and to offer an expanded view of how this region fares in the transnational development along the South Texas/Mexico border.

### **Third Space and the Institutionalization of the Rio Grande Valley**

So that there may be a greater understanding and analysis of the institutionalization of the targeted region, it is necessary to augment Paasi's theoretical framework. To continue this thrust, one must consider his observations that, "a region is comprehended

as a concrete dynamic manifestation of social (natural, cultural, economic, political, etc.) processes that affect and are affected by changes in the spatial structures over time" (1986, p. 110). This proposition is similar to that of Gilbert (1988) who holds that, "the region is defined as specific set of cultural relationships between a group and particular places" (p. 210). Garfield (1991) mirrors the same perspective when he observes that, "regions are simply more discrete geographic spaces in which different social groupings can be analyzed in more detail" (p. 64).

Garfield's (1991) study of the influence of the Ottawa River that separates the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec provides a point of reference as the regionalization of the Rio Grande Valley is considered. While the Canadian dynamic is intra-national, the separation of these two regions has, according to Gilbert, created a "Janus effect" in that Ontario and Quebec have distinct metropolitan forces at play that affect the residents of either region. According to Garfield (991), an article in the French newspaper, *Le Monde* in 1985, provided the following description of this region as, "une région entre deux mondes," (p. 67). Essentially, Garfield's hypothesis is that a line of demarcation, such as the Ottawa River, acts as a boundary or barrier to the identity of residents of the affected regions since they literally exist in two worlds.

Young (2004) believes that,

There is, however, an important distinction to be made between the border as a concept on the one hand, and as a physical place on the other. Abstract borders exist everywhere, between cultures, races, cities, bodies, gender and sexualities. The geographical boundary between the United States and Mexico is a temporally and physically specific manifestation of the more general, abstract borders...Although it would be presumptuous and misguided to argue that the Texas-Mexico border provides a universal template of cultural interactions, the heightened complexities and ambiguity of identity on this border helps us to appreciate the subtle shadings and gray zones that characterize cross-cultural relationships more generally. (p. 6)

Saldívar (2006) confirms Young's assessment of the borderlands and the experiences of its inhabitants of this region,

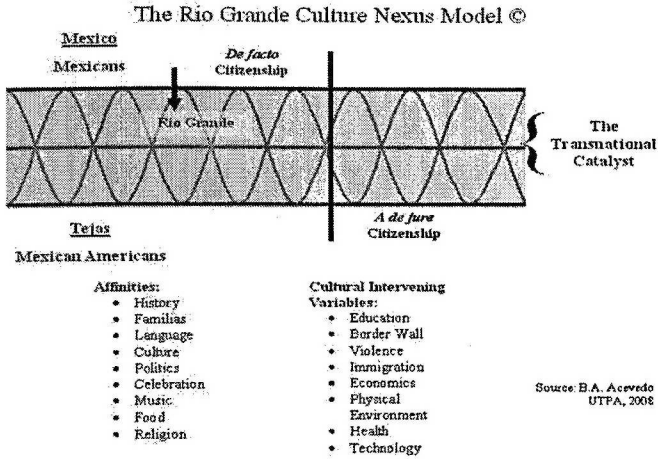
during the nineteenth century, as a coherent in-between place resulted in what he refers to as a "third-space", which has in many ways separated borderlanders from both Mexico and the United States (p. 27).

Garfield's position is not unlike that of Gutierrez (1999) who believes that, "the evidence of new forms of identity and orientation are obvious. For example, habitual transmigrants and their extended families on both sides of the border represent one case of a group that may well be operating under substantially different assumptions and expectations about their place in the nation-state" (p. 512). Gutierrez paraphrases the anthropologist Michael Kearney who refers to this experience as "transnationalizing" the identities of people who habitually travel through the social space transformed by these trends" (p. 513). Foucault refers to these spaces as "heterotopias" and described them as, "the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs" (as cited in Soja. 1996. p. 15).

A theoretical augmentation to the concepts and theories, previously delineated in this paper, is represented by Figure 2. The Rio Grande Culture Nexus Model is therefore proposed as the means to conceptualize the dynamics of the borderlands as "Third Space." This model will also serve to describe some current and emerging phenomena that affect the institutionalization of the Rio Grande Valley and the development of its identity as it is affected by its proximity to Northern Mexico communities. This theoretical concept is a response to Zavaleta's (1986) proposition that,

a general theory of international borders can be applied with modification to the U.S.-Mexico border, since it is unlike any other in the world. Many of the forces which shaped the border generate from the fact that the developed side of the border (U.S.) produces forces which "pulls" people from the undeveloped side of the border (Mexico) to the developed side...A complete and functioning model for bordertowns can only be seen as a symphony of symbiosis, border theory, central place and culture which have been orchestrated by time and reviewed by history. (p. 126)

Figure 2.



The Rio Grande Culture Nexus Model represents two essential elements, *Affinities*, and *Cultural Intervening Variables* that are present on a daily basis as the borderlanders (Martinez, 1994, p.62-63) on both sides of the Rio Grande go about their lives. This situation is similar to Garfield's reference to the *une région entre deux mondes* label put on the Canadian regions of Ontario and Quebec by *Le Monde*. An additional representation of this dual life experience is provided by Martinez (1994) when he proposes that, "the major influences that shape the way of life of borderlanders include the borderlands milieu, education, social interaction, employment/income, consumerism, core culture and popular culture" (p. 63). This theoretical construct is not all-inclusive since there are other variables that one might consider, among those being politics, food, music, religion, education, health and technology. To address these variables in this paper would require more attention than can be provided. The variables described here are those that are the most prevalent at this time. Further research should expand on these variables and others as the institutionalization of the Rio Grande Valley continues to be studied.

In the proposed model, the Rio Grande represents the Transnational Catalyst because it is a line of demarcation crossed by Mexicans and Mexican Americans. This boundary is crossed daily as they conduct the events that Martinez referred to. This boundary is a historically significant geographic point as the designated

borderline between Texas and Mexico, by the Treaty of Guadalupe. This boundary has created what is referred to here as De Facto Citizens, Mexicans, and De Jure Citizens, the Mexican Americans who were granted citizens in the borderlands by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Regardless of their national citizenship status; their lives play out within this Third Space.

Suárez-Mier (2007) believes that, "for all the differences between Mexico and the United States, the border region forms an unbreakable bond between these two countries. The communities that lie along and frequently straddle it enjoy a unique symbiosis that impels them to work together to address common problems: legal and illicit trade, pollution, and management of water resources, crossing of people, who work on one side but live on the other, and endless exchanges that make them far more attached to each other than with other towns in their own countries" (p. 17). Kearney and Knopp (1995, pp. 71-95), believe that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo created the conditions for duality of life on the border. They cite the loss of southern river towns, including Matamoros, Reynosa, Carmargo, Mier and Guerrero of their community's land on the north side of the river: the Rio Grande.

Kearney and Knopp (1995) also claim that the "Twin Cities" or "Border Cuates" have been important to the development of the borderlands, when they explain that,

The border towns, while long isolated from and unsung by the main societies of the two respective countries, have played a significant role in the destinies of their two nations and seem destined to play an even larger role in the future. Their local interactions exert an impact in the larger relations between the two parent countries...the cliché that the border towns have been mere victims of national policies is inaccurate. At times, they have exerted an impact on the fate of the entire continent. Local influence was at work in the creation of the United States-Mexico border. Activities in these towns helped to catalyze the Mexican-American war. Border town developments also played a role in the entry of the United States into World War I. Most recently, local problems have helped to draw national governments into such experiments as the *bracero* program, PRONAF, the *maquiladora* program and now the free trade zone talks. (p.3)

The significance of these border communities on the development and maintenance of the affinities, cited in the Nexus Model, is approached by Zavaleta (1986) when writing about Brownsville-Matamoros states that, "the history of the Brownsville-Matamoros border community brings to life the fullest meaning of the concept of symbiosis. In the biological sense, the term describes the mutual interdependence of two organisms. However, when applied to bordertowns the concept implies the idea of interrelated cultures, economies and societies" (p. 125). The advent of the maquiladora industry (twin plants with production on the Mexican side and supply on the United States side of the border) in 1965 and its impact on transnational economies is cited by Kearney and Knopp (1995). The significance of these industries is also touched by Zavaleta (1986) and most recently by Gilmer and Cañas (2005) in their report for the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. Gilmer and Cañas (2005) observed that, "there is strong economic interaction between border city pairs, apparent from a count of auto, truck, and pedestrian traffic crossing the bridges that connect them, from the number of Mexican license plates on autos parked in U.S. malls, or the many service and good suppliers in the U.S. border cities that support manufacturing located in Mexico" (p. 3).

Research by Acevedo, de los Reyes and Rodriguez (2002) confirmed the data and observations of Gilmer and Cañas but it also cited some concerns about the presence of governmental oversight agencies on the border and the environmental impact of economic growth on the borderlands. The research showed, "that the Texas-Mexico Border is one of the most regulated sections of the nation. There is a multitude of local, state, and federal governmental agencies with parallel, concurrent and sometimes overlapping roles and responsibilities" (p. 29).

According to Acevedo et al. (2002), "these interwoven activities lead to the presence of over thirteen state and federal government agencies along with some city and county law enforcement departments on the border...the present governmental oversight status quo has both an indirect and direct effect on the border's economy, its infrastructure and on the quality of life of its population" (p. 29). A core quality of life issue concerns the very geographic foundation to the institutionalization and regionalization of the Rio Grande Valley; the deterioration of the Rio Grande as a result of pollution from both sides of the border and pollutants generated

by industry, vehicular, and rail traffic. The critical challenge here may prove to be the environmental crisis that could impair the continued viability of the Rio Grande as a waterway.

Sowell (2000), in a summary report to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported that, "the border area faces many binational environmental challenges, such as limited water supply and poor water quality, inadequate or nonexistent sewage treatment, air pollution, little or no treatment and disposal of hazardous and industrial waste, the potential for chemical emergencies, incidence of infectious diseases, and lack of the verification of compliance in the transboundary shipment of hazardous waste" (p. 5). EPA covers these issues again in 2008 and a full inventory of its analysis of the borderland environment is provided in its annual reports for the years 2000 to 2008.

The three intervening variables considered here are immigration, the construction of barriers such as the Border Wall and violence. Proposed here, is that the present immigration issue originated when the Treaty of Guadalupe was signed in 1848. This treaty initiated the Diasporas of the both the de facto and de jure populations of the borderlands (Gutierrez, 1999; Martinez, 1994; Saldivar, 2006; Waddan, 2007). Immigration is now a major consideration in the current presidential campaigns. It has also become the source of much concern and accusations by politicians on both sides of the aisle. As previously mentioned, it is also the source of the founding of vigilantes such as the Minutemen. This non-governmental group purports to guard America's southern border with Mexico against Mexicans and terrorists.

An offspring of the immigration issue is the expansion and construction of the fence along the border with Mexico to deter undocumented immigration and the intrusion of potential terrorists. The proposal to expand the border fence has affected Rio Grande Valley residents who own land through which the fence will be constructed.

Blumenthal reported in the New York Times (January 13, 2008) that one of the most affected residents is Dr. Eloisa G. Tamez, who is a nursing director at the University of Texas, Brownsville and Texas Southmost College. She owns three acres in El Calaboz, the remnant of a 12,000-acre land grant to her ancestors in 1747

by the King of Spain. The barrier would rise within feet of her backyard, as well. "It's all I have," said Dr. Tamez, 72, a widow who served for years as a chief nurse in medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs. "Who do they think we are down here? Somebody sitting under a cactus with a sombrero taking a nap?"

The construction of the border fence will proceed as reported by Martin for the *Houston Chronicle* (June 24, 2008). It was reported that, "the high court, without comment, declined to hear an appeal from two environmental groups — the Sierra Club and the Defenders of Wildlife. They had filed suit to reverse a decision by the Homeland Security secretary, Michael Chertoff, to waive environmental and other laws and regulations that would have slowed construction of 670 miles of border fencing by the end of the year. Some 331 miles of fencing have been constructed on the project that, when completed, will include segments from just south of San Diego to Brownsville."

Velázquez (2007) views the construction of physical barriers, such as the wall as, "a product of cultural differences, mutual prejudices, and conscious acts by particular groups. Exclusion was a means to hinder as much as possible the coexistence and exchange between U.S. society and those perceived as different and therefore dangerous" (p. 172).

The final intervening variable concerns the inordinate violence on the borderlands. It is ironic that violence, which has been presented here, as a key factor in the institutionalization of the Rio Grande Valley, is still present. While this topic is addressed extensively in this paper, it is worth reiterating since increasing crime is associated with illegal immigration, the risky business of human smuggling, an increase in the drug trade and an expanded presence of violent gangs on the borderlands (Orrenius and Roberto Coronado, 2005).

The 2005 and 2006 annual reports of the South Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) provide an overview of the most pervasive cause of violence in this region: drugs. While the violence of the nineteenth and twentieth century was directed at the disenfranchisement of the Rio Grande Valley and the balance of the borderlands, the present violent is indiscriminate and directed at control of drug traffic by cartels and violent gangs who have migrated to the border from South and Central America. The HIDTA states that, "The crime rate, both within the region and



across the Mexican border, continues to impact on the normal, day-to-day activities of citizens living within the Southwest Border South Texas HIDTA (SWB STX HIDTA) area" (p.1). The economic impact of drug trafficking is estimated to be over \$13 billion annually and much of this traffic occurs within the four counties of the Rio Grande Valley. It is alleged, although no succinct data is cited, that one of the driver and impetus for this drug traffic is the region's high poverty rates. The Cross Border Institute for Regional Development (CBIRD), in a 2002 benchmarking report of Cameron County and Matamoros, Tamaulipas cited data from the U.S. Bureau that indicated that Cameron and Hidalgo county were the poorest of 220 national counties with a population of at least 250,000. These two concerns: violence and poverty will be a challenge to policy brokers and government officials at all levels on both sides of the Rio Grande.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to identify and describe phenomena that would confirm and validate the institutionalization and identity of the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley. The institutionalization of this region has been demonstrated as one that is anchored in its history, its location between two nations at different levels of economic development and by the life experience of residents on both sides of a shared borderland. By all standards of Paasi's theory, the Rio Grande Valley is institutionalized but on its terms. The future stability of the region will depends on how its leadership responds proactively to critical forces such as environmental deterioration of the Rio Grande, immigration, transnational economics, violence, and homeland security actions of the federal and state governments and its own determination to remain a unique part of this hemisphere. Unfortunately, this region's development is affected by the national capitals of both Mexico and the United States, which are hundreds of miles from the borderlands and might be totally unaware or misinformed about the conditions that their policies affect the institutionalization of both sides of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo.

The challenge here, to policy brokers, regional political leaders and scholars, is to encourage, support and conduct research which leads to a better understanding of the policy dynamics evident in both Mexico City and Washington, D.C. that have implications

for the borderlands. Poyo and Hinojosa (1999) believe that, "it is the regional and local framework, and the consequent focus on socioeconomic development that will prompt scholars to reconsider the colonial Borderlands' significance to the United States. By studying the dynamics of communities that came under North American control, historians will identify continuities across sovereignties. Commercial ties, migration patterns, class structure, racial attitudes, economic pursuits, and cross-cultural relationships are significant themes in the nineteenth and twentieth century that need to be traced from their origins" (p. 89). It recommended that these same issues be evaluated within the context of regional institutionalization during the twenty-first century as scholars continue to study the borderlands.

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# La escritura como terapia de rehabilitación para personas con discapacidad psiquiátrica<sup>3</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Investigación aplicada al desarrollo de la inteligencia lingüística y su interrelación con la inteligencia emocional, que demostró como las personas con discapacidad psiquiátrica alcanzaron una alta producción escrita, que conlleva la lectura, actividad básica de acceso a la construcción de saberes comandados por la memoria implícita o de abstracción, y que representan una actividad de gran complejidad en este tipo de sujetos, debido a que se ha demostrado por neuroimagen que presentan una disfunción en el hemisferio izquierdo que controla el comportamiento lingüístico en su duplicidad sensomotriz-audioverbal y la habilidad paralela para la expresión escrita.

Applied investigation to the development of linguistic intelligence and its interrelation with emotional intelligence, demonstrated that the people with psychiatric incapacity reached a high written production, that entails the reading, basic activity of access to the construction of commanded knowledge by the implicit or abstraction memory, and that represents an activity of great complexity in this type of subjects, because one has demonstrated by neuroimagen that they present/display a dysfunctions in the left hemisphere that controls the linguistic behavior in its sensomotor-audioverbal duplication and that controls the parallel ability for the written expression.

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Este artículo pretende dar a conocer un aporte significativo al conocimiento en materia de rehabilitación para personas con discapacidad psiquiátrica, como resultado de una investigación sistemática y rigurosa sobre la base de un trabajo de campo en torno al funcionamiento del sistema simbólico verbal, la regulación de los esquemas emocionales y el ejercicio reflexivo a través de la escritura y la creatividad expresiva.

El objetivo fue dirigido a estimular los procesos cognitivos y el manejo apropiado de los estados emocionales a través del desarrollo de la inteligencia lingüística; crear nuevas oportunidades de aprendizaje para este tipo de sujetos; favorecer su potencial creativo por la construcción de significados; promover su interacción con otras personas por la práctica social del lenguaje y proporcionarles un ambiente positivo de estudio, que les permitiera adquirir algunas competencias en favor de su proceso de rehabilitación y mejora en la calidad de vida.

Los datos obtenidos en esta investigación, demuestran de manera evidente que la escritura está ligada a la salud, pues la práctica de escribir, promueve el reconocimiento de las propias capacidades y limitaciones; fomenta la habilidad de aprender a pensar en forma positiva, es decir, desarrolla procesos cognitivos y regula las emociones, objetivos fundamentales de las orientaciones psicoterapéuticas en favor de personas con enfermedades mentales graves y crónicas.

Existe una gran diversidad de libros, talleres y sistemas de autoayuda disponibles para tratar de ayudar a personas con discapacidad, pero pocos enfocados a este tipo de pacientes. Algunos podrían ser de ayuda, otros mera charlatanería, sin embargo, el taller literario que se ofrece como un servicio educativo gratuito a jóvenes con discapacidad psiquiátrica o vulnerabilidad al estrés, en condición estable, es producto de una investigación que realicé por espacio de muchos años de estudio, convivencia diaria y visitas a hospitales psiquiátricos. Respeto y me apego, de manera absoluta a los descubrimientos científicos en esta materia, pero al mismo tiempo he tomado en cuenta mi experiencia como lingüista para acercar a mis alumnos a la escritura expresiva, obteniendo resultados exitosos para la mayor parte de los participantes.

Su valor agregado conlleva la tendencia a la universalización

de la enseñanza, pero además, reducir desigualdades y avanzar en la construcción social de los valores morales de justicia y equidad; intensificar el combate al rezago educativo en grupos marginados y consolidar conductas de solidaridad en apoyo a los derechos humanos; romper con estigmas preestablecidos y trabajar en favor del discapacitado psiquiátrico que tiene derecho a vivir una vida digna.

Pero además, responder institucionalmente, al desafío ético del desarrollo al poner en práctica un proyecto piloto de enseñanza alternativa, basado en el respeto, la valoración de las diferencias y la nueva visión biopsicosocial de la discapacidad que invierte la desigualdad, buscando ayudar a la población que se encuentra en situación vulnerable, especialmente las personas catalogadas como "enfermas mentales".

Desde el punto de vista del cognitivismo y la neurociencia, trabajar en regular las emociones con el ejercicio de la función reflexiva y creativa en personas con discapacidad psiquiátrica, significa entrar en un proceso activo de aprendizaje que ayuda al sujeto a enfrentar y aceptar el mundo real, así como, adquirir conocimientos que son necesarios para su inserción en el mundo social y laboral.

La investigación puntualiza en la escritura como un prototipo para mejorar la actividad mental y el manejo de las emociones en estas personas. Experiencia científica de gran impacto y relevancia, porque incorpora nuevas facetas del conocimiento en torno a la recuperación y la rehabilitación, recurso de intervención social para todos aquellos que están interesados en la atención y la integración comunitaria y laboral de personas con discapacidad psiquiátrica.

Mi hipótesis fue que la práctica de la escritura, favorece el desarrollo de la inteligencia lingüística. Incrementa el funcionamiento reflexivo y ayuda a la regulación emocional, generando en estas personas, autoestima y la recuperación de su identidad, el sentido de si mismo, que implica una nueva estructura del ego, factores determinantes de su proceso de recuperación e integración a la vida social y productiva.

El análisis de los procesos que ocurren durante la escritura han sido estudiados desde diversas posturas teóricas. Sin embargo, esta investigación se fundamenta en:



\* La *Teoría de las inteligencias múltiples*(MI) de Howard Gardner, que entiende las diferencias en términos de habilidad en el manejo del conocimiento lingüístico, sumada al enfoque de los cognotivistas que analizan el componente auto-reflexivo y la regulación de los esquemas emocionales.

\* La *Teoría de la diferenciación psicológica* que enfatiza en la importancia del funcionamiento de los recursos lingüísticos disponibles para el desarrollo de las habilidades en el manejo del lenguaje, y por ende los mecanismos comunicativos para la integración interpersonal y social (Camargo-Uribe, 2003).

\* La *Inteligencia emocional*(Goleman, 1995), que surge como reacción al enfoque de inteligencias meramente cognitivas (IM) sumándose a las críticas de los detractores de los test tradicionales (CI). Su autor afirma el valor implícito del manejo de las emociones para tener éxito en la vida sin necesidad de grandes habilidades académicas. Otros autores (Mayer 2001; Schutte 2002; Barret y Gross 2001), han evolucionado el modelo original, destacando como uno de sus componentes principales: la autorregulación emocional, habilidad de afrontar las demandas y presiones del medio ambiente y la posibilidad de tener una mejor perspectiva de la vida, tanto en personas sanas como en aquellas que han sido afectadas por un problema mental.

Desde el punto de vista metodológico, la posibilidad de conjuntar la (MI), (IE), (TDP) fue todo un reto, pero a la vez un camino rico en alternativas. Algunos investigadores, afirman que la integración de diversas posturas teóricas, ofrece la posibilidad de incorporar experiencias valiosas a favor de la investigación, por ello se estudiaron planteamientos diversos para finalmente integrar la atención psicosocial en el marco de la actividad mental y la vida afectiva. Componentes esenciales para poner en práctica intervenciones educativas en la modalidad grupal y el desempeño de competencias, habilidades, actitudes y valores, correlacionadas con diferentes estilos de aprendizaje para leer y escribir.

Esta dinámica me llevó a descubrir una nueva modalidad para promover el desarrollo de las estructuras del pensamiento y la capacidad de construcción de nuevos conocimientos. De manera tal, que puedo aseverar, que desarrollar una escritura creativa-expresiva, permite que las personas con discapacidad psiquiátrica, estén en capacidad de aprehender la realidad y comprender la relación que se establece entre ésta y la persona.

El procesamiento selectivo de la información a través de la escritura, estimuló en mis alumnos el funcionamiento reflexivo, reforzando su autoestima y la regulación de las emociones, Pero también, el desarrollo de la inteligencia lingüística, estimuló tanto la interacción humana como la eficiencia cognitiva, cambiando favorablemente sus vidas y orientándolos hacia un proceso de recuperación y rehabilitación.

Mi experiencia docente en el campo de la lingüística, se reforzó al observar la bondad de cultivar la escritura, en beneficio de los seres humanos. Numerosos lingüistas se han ocupado de este tema, la opción ahora, es salvaguardar la dignidad inalienable de la persona, ley moral inscrita en el corazón de la humanidad

El trabajo de campo, se llevó a cabo con un grupo de personas con discapacidad psíquica que asistieron al taller literario. La población inicial era de 21 personas, 14 jóvenes y 7 adultos, pero algunos desistieron, quedando solamente 14, quienes permanecieron constantes durante todo el periodo. El espacio para la realización del taller fue la Facultad de Psicología de la UANL.

Con el fin de analizar la variante de la inteligencia lingüística, se realizó un trabajo de campo por espacio de dos años, haciendo un estudio comparativo con el grupo de intervención (personas con discapacidad psiquiátrica) y otro de control, sin problema de discapacidad. Tanto en un grupo como en el otro, se aplicaron las mismas estrategias didácticas para posteriormente examinar los textos escritos y el desempeño de cada uno de los participantes en el aula. Para la evaluación de la información, los cuadernos de los alumnos, fueron sometidos a un análisis preciso sobre la base de categorías clasificatorias relevantes a la investigación.

Con respecto a la inteligencia emocional (IE), se incluyó un conjunto de capacidades, competencias y habilidades no cognitivas vinculadas con la autoestima y la satisfacción con la vida.

El análisis de las muestras independientes, conjugó 11 variables que se mencionan más adelante, integradas en dos grandes categorías: inteligencia lingüística (habilidades lingüísticas y creatividad) e inteligencia emocional, que fueron procesadas estadísticamente.

Examinando la consistencia de los porcentajes totales obtenidos y la interacción entre ellos, la muestra estadística de la

probabilidad asociada al estadístico "F", fue claramente menor al 0.05, y por tanto, la igualdad de varianza se rechaza. Lo mismo sucedió con la probabilidad asociada al estadístico "t" menor a 0.05, donde la igualdad de medias también se rechaza.

Los indicadores señalados nos revelan que hay una diferencia significativa entre nuestro grupo de intervención y el de control en cuanto a las variables: escribir un cuento, entender conceptos, componer y hacer juegos, describir situaciones, organización lógica, manejo de emociones, inteligencia emocional, relacionada con la experiencia vivencial, conductual, fisiológica. Excepción hecha de dos variables: coherencia temática y proceso de interactuar verbalmente.

Los porcentajes obtenidos nos manifiestan como la probabilidad asociada del estadístico "F" es claramente mayor a 0.05, razón por la cual, la igualdad de varianza se acepta. Este factor se observa igualmente en la probabilidad asociada al estadístico "t" mayor a 0.05, cuya igualdad de medias se acepta. Los datos estadísticos consecuentemente, son demostrativos de que no hay una diferencia significativa en el grupo de intervención y el grupo control en cuanto a las dos variables expresas, coherencia temática y proceso de interactuar verbalmente.

Estos datos, por tanto, de no existencia de diferencia significativa entre los dos grupos, me llevan a afirmar que el grupo de personas con discapacidad psiquiátrica, es susceptible, a medida que se repita el taller, de alcanzar una probabilidad asociada al estadístico "t" menor a 0.05, lo que significa, que serían capaces de integrarse a la vida social y productiva.

En otras palabras, si al inicio del taller se pudo detectar en casi todos los alumnos la falta de motivación para vivir, y por consecuencia, poco o nulo interés por escribir, al final todos ellos, eran capaces de expresarse por escrito, crear textos narrativos o poéticos. Estaban interesados en seguir escribiendo y eran capaces, con más práctica, de igualar sus habilidades los del otro grupo, conforme a la evolución del cuadro clínico de cada uno de ellos.

Los resultados obtenidos de mayor significación fueron los siguientes:

\* Un manejo de habilidades lingüísticas que les permitió escribir poesías y narraciones, utilizando uso de conceptos abstractos, en algunos casos.

\* **Comprensión de lectura.** Se pudo identificar dos tipos de lectores: uno, que podría contextualizar su lectura a partir de elementos ajenos a la lectura misma o no necesariamente relevantes para la temática del texto; otro, que asume la tarea de comprender el texto a partir del éste, sin introducir elementos extraños a la lectura.

\* **Uso de diferentes modalidades del procesamiento verbal.** Uno, que procesa con detalle las microestructuras retóricas, los usos estéticos del sistema de lengua y los factores pragmáticos para reconstruir el texto; otro, que sólo llega a una comprensión e interpretación global del texto.

\* **Escritos que entretejen dos mundos:** el de los objetos, las ideas o redes semánticas y el de las personas y las emociones. Ambos mundos son interdependientes en la construcción del conocimiento y la interacción comunicativa. Pero, cada persona, privilegia uno u otro conforme a su dominio cognitivo.

\* **Despliegue de habilidades más allá de la lectura y escritura.**

\* **Interacción de saberes, haceres y actitudes en interrelación con los diversos tipos de inteligencia.**

\* **Manejo adecuado entre código verbal e inteligencia emocional, determinante de la metacompetencia comunicativa, uso del léxico, comprensión del significado y desarrollo de la abstracción (Jensen, 2003).**

\* **Fuerte relación entre la inteligencia emocional y el espacio semiótico.** Ámbito escasamente explorado y que reviste gran interés en futuras investigaciones.

\* **Creatividad (escribir cuentos, historias, poemas o relatos personales)** como una terapia de recuperación, al desencadenar emociones que conectan la activación de campos neuronales, permitiendo recobrar interés en la vida.

Los datos anteriores, son altamente significativos, pero es necesario destacar de manera significativa, que el desarrollo de estas competencias, sólo es posible aplicando estrategias didácticas fincadas en: la aceptación de la persona, calidad de la educación con equidad, interacción comunicativa sin temor a posibles críticas; patrones positivos en la transmisión de ideas, opiniones y conceptos, en suma, una competencia comunicativa prácticamente negada para ellos en sus circunstancias habituales, y que en este caso, les permitió empezar a enfrentar la realidad y entrar francamente a un proceso de aceptación de la enfermedad y por consiguiente de su recuperación.

Insisto en la importancia de estos factores, porque ningún

proyecto de intervención social con personas que sufren de una discapacidad mental y crónica, podrá cristalizar en plenitud, sin el apoyo que necesitan como seres humanos dignos de respeto y comprensión, independientemente del que requieren de su familia, especialista y, por supuesto, del esfuerzo y la cooperación de cada uno de ellos.

Las personas con discapacidad psiquiátrica, pueden ser ayudadas a reconstruir su vida y confianza, haciéndolos saber y sentir, que son capaces de ser útiles para ellos mismos y los demás. Este taller literario es una prueba fidedigna de ello, donde a partir de promover destrezas cognitivas, se logró favorecer los sentimientos de valía personal, su autoestima y su interés por vivir.

Otro logro de este proyecto, fue que el personal de apoyo en los talleres, fue capaz de trabajar colaborativamente aceptando a mis alumnos como personas dignas de un trato humano, aptos de adquirir conocimientos, habilidades, actitudes y desarrollar su propio proyecto de vida, lo que supone una plusvalía ontológica, es decir, las personas, los hechos, los acontecimientos, entraron en la esfera del valor que trasciende el ámbito del quehacer humano en apoyo a la recuperación y esperanza de vida de estas personas. Lo que significa respetar la dignidad de la persona y asumir una actividad auténticamente educativa con un compromiso ético y moral.

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# Espacio Fronterizo: La Tijuana de Santitos y Peregrinos en Aztlán

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## Abstract

Se presenta un análisis de la representación del espacio urbano de Tijuana en las obras *Santitos* de María Amparo Escandón y *Peregrinos en Aztlán* de Miguel Méndez. Se argumenta que las representaciones espaciales en estas obras reflejan los estereotipos heredados de un imaginario culturalmente centralizado en que se resaltan los aspectos negativos. Se demuestra que las representaciones correlacionan con el grado de arraigo que cada autor tiene en la zona fronteriza.

This paper offers an análisis of the representation of the urban space of Tijuana in the novel *Santitos* by María Amparo Escandón and in *Peregrinos de Aztlán* by Miguel Méndez. The spatial representations in these novels reflects the stereotypes reproduced from a culturally centrist imaginary in which the most negative and morally reprehensible aspects of the city are foregrounded. The analysis also suggests, however, that these representations correlate with the degree of familiarity and intimacy with the border region held by each author.

La intención de este trabajo es analizar la representación del espacio urbano de Tijuana en las obras *Santitos* de María Amparo Escandón y *Peregrinos de Aztlán* de Miguel Méndez. Aún cuando ambos escritores ofrecen imágenes fidedignas de la ciudad, éstos proyectan principalmente los estereotipos heredados de un imaginario culturalmente centralizado en que se resaltan los aspectos negativos. Ambos escritores ofrecen representaciones simbólicas y metafóricas en que se subrayan las características de una ciudad fronteriza que se comporta hostil con desposeídos y marginados. Apoyados en la simbología tradicional propuesta por Cirlot se analizan diferentes símbolos y metáforas alusivos en las obras de Méndez y Escandón. Al ofrecer imágenes estereotipadas de la ciudad fronteriza, espacio en que reina el caos y la prostitución notamos que la intención de



cada narrador difiere en algunos aspectos. Igualmente se percibe, como lo afirma Herni Lefebvre en *La producción del espacio*, que el nivel de conocimiento sobre el espacio que el descriptor posee determina los aspectos que desarrollará al reproducirlo<sup>4</sup>

(61). Por un lado se observa que Méndez, oriundo de la frontera, conoce de primera mano el espacio que trabaja en la mayoría de su obra, mientras que Escandón, originaria del centro de México, al referirse al espacio fronterizo lo describe de una manera escueta, enfocándose en la descripción de espacios cerrados que no son reconocibles como meramente fronterizos. Sin embargo, creemos lo que Luz Aurora Pimentel propone al afirmar que el hecho de mencionar el nombre de un lugar que ya existe en el mundo conlleva carga ideológica, y, si al nombre del espacio representado se le adhiere una nomenclatura de adjetivos, adverbios y frases adjetivales, la carga simbólica aumenta creando una imagen más perdurable en el lector (25). Consecuentemente, la descripción del lugar real representado en un texto ficticio "tiende a ser de valor altamente referencial [...] ya sea mediante el uso de nombres propios o como nombres comunes cuya constitución acuse un alto grado de particularización semántica" (26). Tanto en *Santitos* como en *Peregrinos de Aztlán* la descripción de los espacios, el uso de los colores y los nombres de los personajes estimulan un ambiente con carga negativa y asfixiante.

Tijuana es la ciudad fronteriza que a lo largo del siglo XX más se describió con epítetos peyorativos de ciudad del caos, del vicio, del crimen organizado, del narcotráfico, de la barbarie, de la prostitución, de la violencia, de la pobreza, de la incultura y de la corrupción. Estos calificativos han sido impuestos por una tradición establecida desde los centros de poder mexicano y estadounidense. Igualmente se ha señalado en repetidas ocasiones que estos calificativos han sido los encargados de crear la "leyenda negra" sobre la ciudad fronteriza. Por el lado estadounidense, como Trujillo

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4 Henri Lefebvre igualmente distingue el conocimiento del espacio representado basado en los verbos "saber" y "conocer" para analizar los diferentes niveles de conocimiento. Por un lado el verbo "saber", *savoir*, indica el tener información sobre el lugar representado. El verbo "conocer" *connaissance*, que implica el haber vivido dentro del espacio representado. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. La ficha completa se encuentra en la lista de obras citadas.

Muñoz ha anotado en su investigación "La frontera: Visiones vagabundas", a partir del siglo XIX algunos escritores, filibusteros, exploradores e historiadores anglosajones hicieron representaciones despectivas y vagas del espacio fronterizo mexicano o el "Viejo Oeste" y sus habitantes. En la escritura mexicana el espacio fronterizo también rha sido epresentado en obras de las Martín Luis Guzmán, José Vasconcelos, José Revueltas, Sara Seřchovich, y Paco Ignacio Taibo II. Estos escritores también se han inclinado por repetir y enfatizar los aspectos negativos de las ciudades fronterizas.

La fundación e historia de Tijuana es similar a otras ciudades fronterizas. En 1769 se funda la Misión de San Diego, primera de las veintiuna que se fundarían en la Alta California durante la Colonia. En 1817 Don Santiago Argüello Moragan, después de servir como militar en los presidios de San Francisco, Santa Bárbara y San Diego "solicitó se le otorgara esta tierra en recompensa por sus servicios como soldado en el presidio de San Diego" (Martínez Zepeda, par. 2), petición que le fue concedida en 1829. Décadas después del Tratado de Guadalupe, en 1889 se planifica el asentamiento urbano y es el año reconocido como la fundación de Tijuana, iniciándose la odisea de la ciudad. El "boom" turístico en Tijuana se da entre 1919 y 1933 debido a la Ley Seca en los Estados Unidos. Esta ley prohibía la producción, venta, transporte y consumo de bebidas alcohólicas en el país, provocando el contrabando de licores. Por otro lado, al observarse el gran potencial de mercado que existía en el área se instauraron negocios que incluían la venta de alcohol y espectáculos folclóricos. El éxito turístico trajo consigo un gran movimiento de capital y prosperidad económica, pero a la vez asentó sus bases la industria de la prostitución.

Durante el siglo XX hubo varias olas de emigraciones hacia Tijuana por lo cual la ciudad fue creciendo rápidamente. A principios del siglo llegan a Tijuana emigrantes provenientes de California y Ensenada como causa de auge de empleos que trajo consigo la apertura de nuevos negocios fronterizos. Una segunda ola es durante la década de los treinta debido la Gran Depresión y las deportaciones masivas. En los sesenta se da fin al Programa Bracero y se inicia el Programa de Industrialización de la Frontera, causando que un gran número de braceros se concentrara en las ciudades fronterizas y miles de personas de otros sectores pobres de México se mudaran a la zona fronteriza de Tijuana. De esta manera la ciudad pasa de menos de 200 habitantes en 1889 a cerca de 1 millón 250 mil habitantes en 2005.

María Amparo Escandón nace, crece y recibe su formación inicial como escritora en la Ciudad de México. Al principio experimenta en la cuentística utilizando una temática familiar donde su bisabuelo, el ex-vicepresidente porfirista Ramón Corral es uno de sus protagonistas favoritos (Vallejos-Ramírez 339). En 1989 la autora y su esposo se trasladan a la ciudad de Los Ángeles, California, donde se ha desempeñado como ejecutiva y profesora de creación literaria en la Universidad de California en Los Ángeles. Una vez en los Estados Unidos Escandón resuelve escribir su primera novela y publicarla casi simultáneamente en inglés y español con el título de *Santitos*. La estructura de *Santitos* es tripartita; cada una de las partes ubica, desarrolla y muestra el trayecto del viaje de Esperanza en una odisea mágica que la lleva por tres diferentes espacios. La primera parte pasa en Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, el pueblo natal de la protagonista; la segunda se ubica en Tijuana, lugar de vicio y prostitución y; la tercera en Los Ángeles, California, donde la protagonista encuentra el amor y se encuentra a sí misma. De esta manera, utilizando una estructura dantesca, la protagonista se desplaza por varios espacios experimentando el Purgatorio, el Infierno y la Gloria: Veracruz, Tijuana y Los Ángeles respectivamente. Vallejos-Ramírez afirma que *Santitos* es una novela que se presta a diferentes acercamientos y análisis ya que “enfoca muchos temas importantes como son la corrupción y abandono de menores, la inmigración ilegal a los Estados Unidos, la prostitución y la vida fronteriza” (365). De esta manera, partiendo de la acepción de que una representación se considera una imagen fiel de la realidad y poniendo atención al imaginario centralista de la narradora se analiza la imagen de Tijuana en *Santitos*.

Si al momento de representar un espacio se le agrega al nombre propio toda una nomenclatura de adjetivos, adverbios y frases descriptivas la carga simbólica aumenta cultivando una imagen más poderosa y permanente en el receptor. Entonces, la descripción del lugar real representado en un texto ficticio “tiende a ser de valor altamente referencial y/o icónico, y se presenta, ya sea mediante el uso de nombres propios con referente extratextual, o como nombres comunes cuya constitución semántica acusa un alto grado de particularización semántica, y por lo tanto un alto grado de iconización verbal” (Pimentel 26). Por lo tanto, en *Santitos*, por medio de los lugares representados, los colores utilizados, los personajes que actúan y sus nombres se estimula un ambiente tijuanaense que provoca una sensación de estar atrapado en un ambiente de prostitución.

La configuración de la ciudad de Tijuana en *Santitos* es la de un lugar con características infernales donde se representa la prostitución como elemento inherente de ésta ya que "Tijuana [es] la cantina más grande del mundo [...es] el burdel más grande del mundo" (Escandón 78).

La historia de la novela trata sobre el viaje de Esperanza Díaz, el cual principia en su pueblo Tlacotalpan, Veracruz y termina en Los Ángeles, California. Debido a la muerte de su hija Blanca, quien fallece a temprana edad atacada por "un virus fulminante que todavía no tiene nombre" (35) y el que no se le haya permitido ver el cuerpo de su hija antes de ser sepultado, Esperanza duda que su hija esté muerta. Su duda crece cuando san Judas Tadeo se le aparece y le dice que su hija no está muerta. Igualmente se entera en los noticieros muchas niñas son secuestradas para prostituirlas. Desesperada decide desenterrar el ataúd para verificar que el cuerpo de su hija está ahí, mas nunca logra abrir el ataúd pero al golpearlo éste produce un sonido hueco, como si estuviera vacío. Convencida de que su hija ha sido secuestrada por el doctor Esperanza inicia una odisea tras el rastro de su hija. En la búsqueda Esperanza se verá atrapada en un ambiente de prostitución que se negará abandonar hasta no encontrar a su hija. Esperanza decide renunciar a su trabajo y se emplearse en La Curva, un prostíbulo a las afueras de su pueblo. Después de varios días escucha a dos clientes mencionar sobre la existencia de un lugar donde se pueden conseguir muchachitas de hasta trece años. Esperanza se hace pasar por prostituta-detective para obtener la información. Al confesarse con el cura del pueblo le relata la conversación que escuchó:

Y como estoy haciendo de detective, no pude evitar escuchar la conversación entre dos clientes: El alto dijo: "Te digo, pues, que tienen chamaquitas, bien pollitas. Trece, catorce años, no más. Pero la tienes que reservar con anticipación. Y no creas que están disponibles para cualquiera. (69)

Armándose de valor se atreve a interrumpir para preguntar sobre el lugar. Uno de los tipos, creyendo que es prostituta, la toma del brazo y la lleva a una habitación donde le da la información: El burdel es La Mansión Rosada y está en Tijuana, "[a]llí van los gringos a pagar buen billete del verde para chingarse muchachitas" (72). Inesperadamente Esperanza decide viajar a Tijuana para buscar a su hija.

La segunda parte de la novela se le dedica a la representación de Tijuana. Y es en esta parte donde encontramos que las descripciones de Tijuana poseen valor simbólico e ideológico. Se aprecia que al describir el espacio de Tijuana, Escandón recurre a la creación de ambientes en que se hace una relación implícita entre Tijuana y el infierno. De los espacios tijuanaenses que se describen y por medio de los cuales se presentan símbolos interesantes podemos hablar de El Atolladero, Motel Garaje, lugar en el que Esperanza se hospeda su primera noche en Tijuana. Analicemos, pues, una serie de imágenes en que existe carga ideológica y simbólica.

Con la excepción de que a su llegada a Tijuana Esperanza tiene que caminar de la estación de autobuses a El Atolladero y después a la Mansión Rosada, los espacios que se describen son en su totalidad espacios cerrados. Estos son lugares en que se practica la prostitución, verbigracia, bares, moteles y casas de citas. Los dos lugares de Tijuana descritos en detalle son el motel El Atolladero y la casa de citas La Mansión Rosada. Al narrarse la estancia de Esperanza en Tijuana se describe el interior de estos locales, lo cual sirve de telón de fondo de la historia. Igualmente el motel y la casa de citas conforman una sinécdoque del ambiente de la ciudad. Para poder ingresar en el ambiente y encontrar el paradero de su hija Esperanza aparenta ser prostituta en ambos lugares.

Una vez en Tijuana Esperanza se hospeda en El Atolladero, Motel Garaje. Este lugar representa una introducción de lo que le espera en la ciudad. Veremos que El Atolladero es un antecedente del infierno tijuanaense; éste indica sobre las peripecias que ahí pasará la protagonista. Empecemos por analizar el nombre del lugar para después analizar las descripciones y los personajes que lo habitan. El nombre del motel, El Atolladero, implica un lugar cenagoso del cual es difícil escapar. Para Esperanza El Atolladero simboliza una situación incómoda y peligrosa de la que aparentemente le será difícil desasirse. Las luces relampagueantes de neón que iluminan el rótulo de El Atolladero se componen de los colores rojo y azul. La iluminación del rótulo del lugar y su relampagueo de colores crean la sensación de estar alternativamente entre las llamas y la oscuridad intermitente. Según el *Diccionario de símbolos* los colores tienen una simbología universal en "liturgia, heráldica, alquimia, arte y literatura" (Cirlot 143). El rojo se encuentra entre los colores que corresponden a los procesos de asimilación, actividad e

intensidad. Igualmente, como afirma Cirlot, el rojo representa la sangre palpitante, la herida, la agonía, la sublimación y el fuego; mientras que el azul simboliza la oscuridad y el anaranjado las llamas (144). De esta manera la entrada de Esperanza a El Atolladero se puede comparar como la bajada de Dante al infierno. Al seguir este patrón descriptivo en la descripción del lugar y en la entrada de Esperanza al motel se conforma lo que Pimentel llama configuraciones descriptivas. La entrada al motel se describe de manera lóbrega: "la puerta rechinó. El lugar estaba en penumbra, olía a alfombra húmeda y tenía un pequeño bar mal provisto" (Escandón 82). La configuración descriptiva se da en esta escena ya que el patrón que siguen las frases descriptivas que exponen la entrada de la protagonista concuerda con las descripciones del local. Estas configuraciones se continúan al describir la habitación en que se hospeda Esperanza.

Al entrar a la habitación los colores siguen influyendo y fortaleciendo el ambiente al motivar emociones con su simbolismo. El color de la habitación, anaranjado "color papaya", y el de cobertor de la cama "amarillo mostaza" (83) simbolizan las llamas. El color de las llamas, el anaranjado, es la mezcla del rojo y el amarillo. Esto se provoca con la entrada de luz roja por la ventana que se mezcla con el amarillo del cobertor y el anaranjado de la pared representando así las llamas en movimiento. A su vez los relampagueos de las luces intermitentes producen un movimiento que causa la ilusión de que la protagonista se encuentra atrapada entre llamaradas y el relampagueo de la luz azul pone momentáneamente la habitación en penumbra. Esta es la forma en que el narrador de Santitos introduce al lector y a la protagonista en un espacio que simula ser un infierno. Al presentir el riesgo Esperanza desempaca su caja de santitos y monta un altar en la habitación.

La descripción de los personajes también influye en la creación del ambiente. Al momento que Esperanza entra al motel conoce al Cacomixtle, el dueño. Si los colores y la iluminación del lugar dan la impresión de estar en el infierno, el Cacomixtle sería la personificación del diablo. El Cacomixtle es un personaje deshumanizado a quien se le añaden particularidades animales. El apodo mismo tiene significado, éste se deriva del náhuatl. Cacomixtle es una variante de cacomiztle, que según el *Diccionario de aztequismos*, es un animal basáride americano parecido a los mapaches con piel de color leonada que causa perjuicios en los corrales de aves (Cabrera 41)<sup>5</sup>. Desde el momento que Esperanza ve al Cacomixtle,

éste es presentado de una manera escatológica, era un “hombre que se entretenía apretándose un grano purulento en la mejilla. Tenía unos ojos pequeños y negros, una trenza delgada que le llegaba a la cintura, y el tatuaje de una víbora que iba de un brazo al otro pasando por los omóplatos. La cabeza estaba en su codo derecho; el cascabel, en el izquierdo” (Escandón 82). El conjunto de la pústula infectada, los ojos pequeños y negros y el tatuaje hacen del Cacomixtle un personaje diabólico. Además su silueta se iluminaba con las luces intermitentes de neón que entraban por la ventana alterando su silueta. Este efecto da la impresión de que el Cacomixtle se presenta a Esperanza rodeado en llamas y como un personaje maligno. Asimismo, en la mitología occidental la serpiente representa el símbolo de la virilidad y el mal. La serpiente es empleada en la representación sexual, “normalmente como imagen del falo, [...] es elemento negativo de peligro [...] y símbolo de maldad” (Cacheiro Varela 76). Así, pues, la imagen del Cacomixtle se acomoda totalmente con el lugar y ambiente que habita: un demonio habitando el fuego del infierno.

Las descripciones simbólicas del Cacomixtle se reafirman con sus acciones cuando haciendo alarde de su masculinidad intenta poseer a Esperanza. El Cacomixtle entra en la habitación creyendo que debido a su poder adquisitivo y atractivo con las mujeres nadie se le resiste, sin embargo al entrar y acariciar libidinosamente a Esperanza lamiéndole el cuerpo, ella se siente agredida y en un intento por desasirse de la situación da un salto acrobático a la cama. Una vez en la cama se lanza al aire en dirección al Cacomixtle para que éste la reciba en sus brazos. El Cacomixtle, inadvertido no alcanza a salir de su sorpresa y al recibirla pierde el balance y rueda por el suelo goleándose la cabeza en la esquina de una mesa. El golpe le hace sangrar y gritar de dolor. Esperanza aprovecha para amenazarlo con su única arma, el tacón de su zapato y le advierte que jamás la toque. El Cacomixtle sale arrastrándose como serpiente y sin comprender cómo fue posible que Esperanza lo rechazara cuando ninguna mujer se había resistido al poder paralizador de su saliva (Escandón 87).

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5Marilyn Rios-Soto en *The Gaze as a Mechanism of Self-Knowledge in the Mexican Novel and Film Santitos: The Outsider as Observer and Object of Desire.*, hace la asociación the nombre Cacomixtle con la de ladrón ya que “caco” significa ladrón: “Cacomixtle (caco meaning Thief) is trickster that appears as ‘the devil’”, página 109. Ficha completa en lista de obras citadas.

Así, como el Cacomixtle es un depredador sexual en su cubil, la madre de éste parece complementar el ambiente. Después del rechazo de Esperanza, en una discusión entre el Cacomixtle y su madre se insinúa la posible relación incestuosa que hay entre ellos. Al ver que Esperanza se ha escapado de las intenciones del Cacomixtle, madre e hijo discuten y éste le recuerda que sus relaciones no son saludables: “[...] *Mientras fuiste una de ellas, no, pero ya terminó todo entre nosotros, [...] Ésta no es una relación sana entre madre e hijo*” (89, Énfasis original). Es la madre del Cacomixtle quien reafirma que su hijo es como el demonio: “[e]l diablo pierde cuando se enamora” (88). El Cacomixtle no soporta haber sido rechazado por Esperanza, sin embargo, esperará pacientemente a que Esperanza regrese de rodillas a buscarlo; Esperanza no regresará sino para sacarle información. Mediante el estudio de los símbolos que se encuentran en el nombre, la descripción, la creación del ambiente y los personajes, advertimos que en conjunto crean una sinécdoque de la ciudad. Tijuana llega a ser presentada como un infierno en el cual predomina la prostitución. Este ambiente se continúa en el siguiente espacio en que se detiene Esperanza.

A la mañana siguiente de haber llegado a El Atolladero, Esperanza se dirige a La Mansión Rosada. Según el informante de La Curva era en La Mansión Rosada donde se prostituía a menores de edad. Es ahí donde Esperanza espera encontrar a Blanca. En La Mansión Rosada sigue viviendo en un ambiente de prostitución, no obstante corre con mejor suerte puesto que, como el nombre lo indican, es una mansión rosada y no un atolladero. También las personas que la habitan son amigables con ella. En esta casa de citas o “residencia privada” los principales clientes son hombres social y económicamente importantes con diferentes profesiones que en su mayoría visitan de California. En la siguiente cita doña Trini, la dueña de la casa, le explica a Esperanza la diferencia entre La Mansión Rosada y otros lugares de mala muerte: “-Este no es un hotel de paso —le explicó doña Trini—. Tampoco un burdel, ni una casa de citas. Es una residencia privada que se especializa en ofrecer servicios sexuales de primera calidad. Sólo atendemos a gente como mister Haynes” (94).

En este lugar Esperanza no es víctima de agresión por parte de los hombres. Lo peor de su odisea lo había pasado en El Atolladero la noche anterior, no obstante el lugar no deja de ser



un lugar en el que Esperanza tiene que desempeñarse como prostituta. En esta residencia Esperanza conoce al juez Scott Haynes de San Diego quien compra su exclusividad. Este juez no busca tener relaciones sexuales con Esperanza, sino que se refugia en ella para llenar un vacío de afecto maternal que nunca recibió de su madre. De esta forma Esperanza se libra una vez más de practicar la prostitución. Varias semanas después de su llegada se convence de que su hija no está en Tijuana y decide buscarla en Los Ángeles. Con la ayuda del juez Scott Haynes Esperanza consigue cruzar la frontera a los Estados Unidos escapando finalmente del atolladero que simboliza Tijuana. Al leer la novela es fácil deducir que el espacio representado en Santitos es poco conocido por el descriptor. Tijuana es para la voz narrativa lo que es para la escritora, así lo afirma Escandón al decir, "cuando siento todo demasiado ordenado en la vida [estadounidense] y necesito un poco de caos me voy para Tijuana" ("Escritora" no pag.).

El escritor Miguel Méndez nació el año de 1930 en el pueblo fronterizo de Bisbee, Arizona. Cuando contaba con sólo cinco años de edad su familia se mudó a El Claro, un pequeño pueblo en el estado de Sonora. Ahí cursó sus estudios primarios, única educación formal que recibiera en su vida, sin embargo, tuvo una madre que le inculcó el amor a la lectura, hecho que lo convirtió en un exitoso autodidacta, escritor y profesor universitario. A la edad de quince años se traslada a Tucson, lugar donde vive actualmente como escritor y profesor jubilado. Su vida, antes de llegar a ser profesor universitario fue de arduos trabajos como "obrero de la industria de la construcción por espacio de ocho meses anuales y jornalero por los otros cuatro en los campos agrícolas" (*Méndez Entre letras* 3). Méndez, cuenta con una extensa lista de obras entre la cuales hay novela, cuento, poesía y ensayo.

En la obra de Méndez se observa una insistencia por representar de los espacios fronterizos, siendo éstos los que predominan en su obra. Cabe mencionar que entre los espacios fronterizos incluidos en su obra resaltan el inmenso desierto sonorense y los espacios urbanos, entre ellos Tijuana. Como se mencionó antes, varios investigadores han notado que el tema de la frontera ha estado presente en la literatura mexicana por más de un siglo. Aunque en muchas de estas obras el espacio fronterizo no tiene un papel protagónico se puede observar que las características que estos escritores destacan revelan una perspectiva

centralista. En esta sección se analiza cómo es que Méndez, mediante un discurso social, logra representar el espacio fronterizo de Tijuana en *Peregrinos de Aztlán*. A primera vista de podría decir que Méndez continúa el estereotipo, sin embargo, al profundizar se puede asegurar que Méndez desmitifica una imagen estereotipada al denunciar el origen de los males fronterizos y al darle voz a los que no la tienen. Es decir, Méndez se aleja de la tradición centralista para ofrecer una perspectiva fronteriza en que el principal asunto es denunciar la situación de los marginados y desposeídos en una ciudad fronteriza forjada en un ambiente de industrialización.

El antecedente histórico en que se produce la obra analizada es la década de los sesenta, época en que se eliminó el Programa Bracero y se dio inicio al Programa de Industrialización de la Frontera. Para 1965 miles de mexicanos fueron repatriados a México concentrándose en las ciudades fronterizas, especialmente en Tijuana. A los repatriados se les sumaron miles de emigrantes de otros sectores pobres del país en busca de empleo en la industria maquiladora<sup>6</sup>.

Como las ciudades no estaban acondicionadas para albergar a la nueva población los emigrantes se vieron obligados a vivir en los márgenes de la ciudad en condiciones precarias debido a la falta de una infraestructura adecuada. En *Peregrinos de Aztlán* se llega a personificar la ciudad mostrando un ambiente ciudadano en el que los personajes se divierten desenfrenada y efímeramente en lugares del vicio, si embargo, estos mismos personajes sufren las asperezas causadas por la pobreza y el hambre.

Pimentel afirma que el uso de nombre propios y nombres comunes, y muy en especial, las descripciones adjuntas a dichos nombres conllevan en sí carga denotativa simbólica. De esta manera se llegan a significar los espacios descritos en el mundo ficticio logrando que el lector conceptúe una relación entre con el mundo

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6 Para más información sobre la presencia de la mujer y la industria maquiladora en la frontera consúltese las obras de Norma Iglesias Prieto, *La flor más bella de la maquiladora*, Rachael Kamel y Anya Hoffman, *The Maquiladora Reader*, Olivia Ruiz Marrujo y Laura Velasco Ortiz, "Mujeres en la frontera norte: su presencia en la migración y la industria maquiladora" y Cruz Arcelia Tanori Villa, *La mujer migrante y el empleo*. Las fichas completas se encuentran en la lista de obras citadas.

“real” representado y el ficticio; es decir, “un texto narrativo cobra sentido sólo en la medida en que el universo diegético entra en relación significativa con el mundo “real” (9) o extradiegético. De esta manera, no sólo el nombrar Tijuana lleva carga referencial sino que las descripciones del espacio representado siguen un patrón de orden descriptivo que desemboca en configuraciones de disposición ideológica.

En *Peregrinos de Aztlán* desde las primeras páginas el lector se encuentra con una prosopopeya de la ciudad en que la ciudad adquiere voz propia y toma el control (re)presentándose a sí misma como una prostituta. De acuerdo con Piña Ortiz la personificación de la ciudad es el recurso central para simbolizar la manifestación de la ciudad ficticia como una mujer degradada (108). Esta manifestación prepondera de la ciudad fronteriza mexicana se da cuando la ciudad deja de ser actuada y actúa ella misma convirtiéndose en personaje protagónico. Como consecuencia, las descripciones que le seguirán a esta personificación serán afines a la auto-presentación y seguirán el mismo patrón. Así la ciudad mostrará su “cara sucia” al exponer la pobreza, la prostitución y la injusticia social que en ella existen y se convierte “en símbolo del caos y del aspecto negativo del Arquetipo Femenino” (Cárdenas 45).

La vida nocturna de la urbe se concentra en lugares cerrados como el *Happy Day*, club nocturno donde se conglera toda una ralea de personajes. En la cita a continuación se escucha a la ciudad invitando a los visitantes a gozar de las delicias fortuitas que la vida nocturna ofrece en una ciudad “singular con aires de reputación dudosa” (Méndez Peregrinos30).

-¡Borrachitos! ¡Alcohólicos! ¡Vengan! ¡Vengan! Préndanse a las fuentes del alcohol como a pechos de doncellas. Hay mucho, pero mucho, mucho alcohol, muchísimos lugares donde beber. No hay cuidado, no se escondan, la ley los acepta plenamente. Acá están los clubes para ricos. ¡Aquí ricachitos! A ustedes les va a costar un poquito más [...] ¡Oh, mis amantes más fieles! Por este rumbo vosotros, queridos borrachines pobres. Ya sé que son puros muertos de hambre y que me aman con pasión. Síganme, soy la diosa de la tomada, dejen a sus hijos y a su mujer llorando con las tripas vacías. (31)

La voz de la "diosa de la tomada" invita a todo tipo de concurrentes al disfrute efímero de sus delicias. Tanto el narrador como la ciudad misma afirman que Tijuana posee cantinas para ricos, pobres, solteros, casados, drogadictos, alcohólicos, ladrones, asesinos y homosexuales. Todo tipo de personas encontrarán lo que buscan, el único requisito es el dinero: "Me olvidaba de un detalle: ¿Traen cueritos de rana? Sí, dólares. Porque si no, no hay de piña, queridos" (30). De esta manera la ciudad adopta un papel protagónico presentándose y definiéndose a sí misma como una ciudad del vicio en que se recibe a todos indiscriminadamente. Como se verá, con la cita anterior se establece el patrón semántico que se seguirá utilizando en cada ocasión que se describa cualquier parte de la ciudad. A su vez, estas descripciones programan un modelo de ordenación que se repite en el discurso del texto conformando las configuraciones descriptivas. En las descripciones de espacio y ambiente el uso de adjetivos y frases calificativas sinónimas destinadas a reconstruir una imagen prefabricada. En las dos citas siguientes se observa patrón:

Esta ciudad singular con aires de "reputación dudosa" amanece redimida con la bullanaga de la estudiantina y las campanadas que invitan a misa, [...] Pero a medida que se van apagando las luces del día y prendiéndose las nocturnas, la ciudad va vistiendo sus arreos de *alcahueta coquetona* con que seducea los incautos. Como una *diosa mitológica, cínica y desvergonzada*, se va aprovechando la ciudad de las debilidades humanas para llenar sus últimos rincones. (30, énfasis nuestro)

Así va la ciudad nocturna *sonsaando amargados, sin vergüenza, descalzonada, nalgas de fuera, impúdica*, con su vestido de noche adornado con letreros de neón, *tronando palmas* a los parranderos como *damisela descocada*. (31, énfasis nuestro)

Aquí se aprecian catálogos de adjetivos y frases que se relacionan entre sí en cuanto a significado. Todas estas frases y adjetivos se inclinan a representar el carácter de prostituta de la ciudad. Y, obvio es que estas descripciones concuerdan con la manifestación en la prosopopeya de la ciudad. Ahora, el uso redundante de un inventario de adjetivos y frases en una descripción no quiere decir que sea un fiel reflejo de la realidad, simplemente es un buen conocimiento de vocabulario sinónimo por parte del descriptor. Esto sin dejar que "la nomenclatura, de entrada, le ofrece[za] al lector una ilusión

de realidad "autorizada" por un referente "real" (Pimentel, 26) que el lector deberá reconocer. Igualmente el patrón se continúa en las descripciones de los inmuebles. Es en la voz narrativa que yace la responsabilidad de describir los edificios yuxtaponiendo a la ciudad con los edificios. Las siguientes dos citas contienen descripciones de edificios en que se percibe el patrón semántico establecido en las citas anteriores.

**A.** Se aplanaban los edificios, las calles se levantaban como paredes pavimentadas, los letreros de la ciudad caían como escupitajos con la terquedad de sus mensajes, untándose en las frentes, atezando nuca con insistencia de arpias sacaojos. [...], la iluminación reflejada contra el smog cubría con un telón podrido la vista de un cielo gloriosamente estrellado. (Méndez 84)

**B.** En los frontales de los edificios las luces de neón punzaban con fiebre contagiosa los nombres de garitos, burdeles y toda clase de mercancías. Alacraneada de marineros de San Diego ansiosos de matar en una orgía el terror[...] Miles de ojos enrojecidos por el alcohol y la lujuria. (133)

En descripciones de los edificios se observa una ciudad agresiva que arremete violentamente contra habitantes y turistas. Las descripciones de los anuncios comerciales en los edificios son semejantes a las hechas al representarse la ciudad misma y al representarlas el descriptor. Entre los calificativos en la cita "A" se encuentran aquéllos que se refieren a las luces: "caían como escupitajos con la terquedad de sus mensajes", "untándose en las frentes", "atezando nuca con insistencia de arpias sacaojos", "la iluminación reflejada contra el smog" que cubre el ambiente como "un telón podrido" ante el contrastante panorama de "un cielo gloriosamente estrellado". En la cita "B" las luces siguen embistiendo con agresividad en su insistente esfuerzo por atraer a los noctámbulos. Las luces de neón en las fachadas de los edificios: "punzaban con fiebre contagiosa" anunciando "los nombres de garitos, burdeles y toda clase de mercancías", atrapando hipnóticamente con el atrayente neón a "miles de ojos enrojecidos por el alcohol y la lujuria". Así, pues, en esta obra la ciudad es una prostituta que se vende y despoja a sus clientes de la "mierda" que es el dinero (133) en un mundo capitalista. La ciudad de Méndez pasa de ser una ciudad perversa a una ciudad víctima del capitalismo; mismo capitalismo que oprime

a sus habitantes. Axiomáticamente, las configuraciones descriptivas no sólo se limitan a presentar una imagen degradada del espacio, sino que se advierte el mismo patrón al describirse el ambiente creado dentro de sus límites:

*Nos hemos cruzado ahogados remando en una laguna hedionda de alcohol, temiendo el encuentro... Arroyos de música, ríos de tequila, despeñaderos de risas impúdicas, lodazales podridos de las palabras puercas, toda la desvergüenza flotando en esta atmósfera nublada de gasolina.* (133, énfasis original)

El ambiente en los espacios abiertos, la calle principalmente, se describe igualmente de una manera degradante en la que los personajes son arrastrados por el movimiento acelerado de los automóviles. Concordamos con Piña Ortiz al afirmar que los espacios abiertos "al igual que los espacios cerrados están degradados en formas contaminadas y asfixiantes (100) causadas por el sonido y la contaminación de los automóviles.

Era sábado ya tarde, la ciudad se animaba con un pulso muy acelerado, la población flotante había arribado con fuerte presión; se desparramaban las aceras de turistas muy dispuestos a pasar "good time". La calle contenía hileras de carros que parecían trenes con miles de cláxones histéricos. [Y] los carros se apretujaban en las calles reptando ansiosos como gusanos hambrientos, sonaban los cláxones igual que alaridos de viejas histéricas. (Méndez 128-133)

En estas citas se advierte que a los automóviles se les otorgan características animales y humanas. De esta manera los automóviles se asocian al movimiento "acelerado" de los turistas hambrientos de diversión fugaz.

Para concluir, se han mencionado casos de representación de la ciudad de Tijuana en la obra de dos escritores mexicanos, María Amparo Escandón y Miguel Méndez, quienes proyectan reflejos de imágenes estereotipadas de Tijuana en que predominan la prostitución y el vicio. Sin embargo, es indudable que la imagen que proyecta Escandón es la representación de un espacio imaginado en que se observa el nivel de conocimiento que tiene sobre la vida y el espacio fronterizos ya que sus personajes se movilizan solamente

en espacios cerrados. De esta manera los espacios cerrados intentan ser una sinécdoque de la ciudad representada. Sin duda, esto se debe a que Escandón sabe sobre la ciudad por medio de la publicidad negativa a cargo de los medios de comunicación o por sus visitas fortuitas a Tijuana. Por otro lado, aunque semejante a la hecha en *Santitos*, Méndez ofrece una imagen de la ciudad fronteriza llena de color local. Al reproducir estas imágenes Méndez intenta denunciar las injusticias en contra de un pueblo indulgente que sufre a causa del capitalismo. En el espacio de Méndez se desarrollan principalmente personajes marginados como el indio, el chicano y “el espalda mojada”. Para finalizar, recordemos que Piña Ortiz señala que en Méndez, “[l]a ciudad es así representada por lugares simbólicos: el horizonte gris y contaminado, los autos y la música estridente, [simbolizando] el lado degradado del progreso. Los espacios cerrados como los burdeles y cantinas simbolizan también la riqueza y la degradación”.

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# El tema de la identidad en *La muerte me da* de Cristina Rivera Garza

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## **Abstract**

Se explora el tema de la identidad en *La muerte me da* de Cristina Rivera Garza. A través de un enfoque posmoderno, se analiza a profundidad la relación con el otro, la fragmentación y la escritura y los géneros literarios en esta obra.

This paper explores the theme of identity in *La muerte me da* by Cristina Rivera Garza. Through the lens of post-modernity, a deep analysis of the relationship with the Other, fragmentation, and writing and literary genres in this work is presented.

En *La Muerte me da* de Cristina Rivera Garza hay un concepto que resulta clave: el de la identidad, del cual se desprenden el de la relación con el otro, el de la fragmentación, así como el de la escritura y el de los géneros literarios. A través de un enfoque posmoderno es posible analizar a profundidad dichos conceptos y su aplicación en esta obra.

La atención de la posmodernidad se centra en el sujeto, un sujeto cartesiano que está en crisis la cual cimbra los fundamentos mismos de la civilización occidental. Según Lacan, dicho sujeto cartesiano se constituye a través del lenguaje, luego de pasar por la etapa del espejo y del temor a la castración, la cual conduce a la entrada en el orden simbólico. Al final de todo ese proceso, dicho sujeto construye una imagen mítica y unitaria de sí que es una ilusión metafísica que oculta el hecho de que somos seres fragmentados, complejos, heterogéneos y productos del otro. De acuerdo a este intelectual francés habría que romper ese hechizo, esa ilusión de unidad, y dejar al descubierto las fisuras. Asimismo él cuestiona la idea del uno, de identidad, de autosuficiencia y de autoconocimiento, así como las relaciones de simétrica complementariedad del orden imaginario. Afirma además que en

Descartes aparece la duda sólo para ser eliminada en un segundo movimiento por el surgimiento de una certeza absoluta.

A dicha certeza, que es una característica que define a la psicosis, Yannis Stravakis, en su libro *Lacan and the Political*, la llama "a delusional belief". En dicho texto se habla de una errónea creencia en una utopía o "aufhebung". Hay en esa fe en una utopía (y no en una distopía) una psicosis pero también "a paranoid urge to delineate the boundries of being" (Stravakis, 20). A ese mundo utópico, paranoide, delineado, lo caracterizan tres objetivos que son: "1) transform disorder to order; 2) total and universal representation, 3) particularity remains outside the universal schema" (Stravakis, 21). Stravakis aclara igualmente que esa utopía abarca asimismo el concepto de género, de lo masculino y lo femenino, y de la relación entre los sexos (hombre y mujer).

Según Simone de Beauvoir, en Occidente la representación del mundo es obra de los hombres; ellos lo describen desde su propio punto de vista y lo confunden con la verdad absoluta. Además, ese poder patriarcal "se ha afinado en toda una red de naturalizaciones y mistificaciones respecto de las diferencias entre hombre y mujer con el objetivo de legitimar la subordinación" (Guerra, 10). Como resultado de dichas naturalizaciones, mistificaciones, naturalizaciones y subordinaciones se han creado imágenes de la mujer que "configuran centros o núcleos que amalgaman un yo metafísica e históricamente preñado de escisiones, silencios y flujos en los bordes del lenguaje que se ha vuelto convencional" (Guerra, 36). Dichas escisiones a las que se refiere Guerra afectan al cuerpo el cual, según David Couzens Hoy, se convierte en una "arena of gladiators in which various self-understandings compete with one another". Él considera además que "biology becomes a social constructed category that can serve to construct social possibilities" y que el cuerpo "is always located somewhere and serves to limit and singularize perspective. The body serves as the situated locus". Como consecuencia de esa perspectiva y de ese locus "the body is in the social world and viceversa". (Couzens Hoy, 30) ¿Qué significa eso? Eso quiere decir que no es posible hablar del cuerpo, ni de la cuestión de género, como algo natural, como una realidad objetiva en la que no cabe lo subjetivo ni la interpretación. Por el contrario, este autor cree que el cuerpo, y en añadidura el sujeto, "is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is" (Couzens Hoy, 15).

Esa invención y proyección tiene su equivalente, dentro de la teoría de Jacques Lacan, en la fase del espejo. Según dicha teoría el sujeto se constituye (...) luego de pasar por la etapa del espejo y el temor a la castración que conducen a la entrada en el orden de lo simbólico" (Guerra, 40). Ese orden de lo simbólico, al igual que el temor a la castración, es una consecuencia de la imposición de la ley del padre. En *Mujer y escritura: fundamentos teóricos de la crítica feminista* su autora menciona que el hombre devalúa a la mujer para constituirse como objeto de poder. Añade que la inferioridad de ella es un espejo que duplica la imagen de él. Todo ello significa que la identidad, a nivel de lo simbólico, busca constituirse con base en jerarquías dentro de las cuales él ocupa un lugar privilegiado, de superioridad y de control. Por el contrario, ella está instalada en el papel de víctima, objeto de deseo sin tener ella misma acceso al desear, representante de lo estático que emana significados sin crearlos. En el caso de la mujer, ella no crea historia, no la genera, al menos no la historia oficial. Eso implica que el varón se puede definir en todo el teatro de la historia mientras que la mujer no y que lo masculino es historia, es tiempo, es acción, mientras que lo femenino es lugar. Según Lucía Guerra, ese lugar, ese espacio, que es cerrado, es el hogar, el cual anula todas las contingencias e implica un *regressus at uterum*; es decir, un regreso a sí mismo.

En *La huella del otro* Emmanuel Levinas denomina egología a esa reducción del otro al mismo, a ese *regressus at uterum*, el cual él critica y considera además que es imposible pues lo que el hombre vive es más bien un movimiento sin retorno. Por el contrario, él propone un recorrido sin regreso a la mismidad, propone una salida hacia la alteridad, hacia ese otro que en la cultura occidental se presenta como siniestro y como una amenaza hacia la identidad cuando en realidad no lo es. Frente a la unidad totalizadora del sistema hegeliano este autor rescata entonces la alteridad que permite la pluralidad. Para él, esa alteridad, esa huella del otro, es éxodo, salida sin retorno, liturgia que alude a una inversión que trae pérdida, imposibilidad de recuperar lo abandonado.

Esa huella del otro puede compararse con la novela de detectives y las huellas que ellos buscan descubrir e intentar seguir para que los lleven a encontrar la identidad del asesino. El tema de los géneros literarios, entre los que se incluye el de la novela de detectives, adquiere relevancia bajo estas circunstancias. Dicha

novela se caracteriza por la búsqueda de absolutos. Certezas inquebrantables que ayudan a organizar el mundo y mediante las cuales se busca crear (inútilmente, según los teóricos posmodernos) metáforas tranquilizadoras que calmen la angustia existencial del hombre. En esos textos, nos dice Levinas, el detective examina como signo todo aquello que marca, en el lugar del crimen, la obra voluntaria o involuntaria del criminal. ¿Qué es lo que hace Sherlock Holmes? Él busca, deduce, reconstruye lo que ha pasado. Pero si todo es deducible, es decir, si para todo hay una respuesta, si para todo hay un nombre y un significado, entonces no hay un otro. Levinas considera que Holmes vive en un mundo donde no hay hombres ni prójimos. Es decir que ahí el hombre habita un espacio en el que aparentemente no existe la arbitrariedad del signo y en el que supuestamente la realidad se refleja a sí misma en las palabras. Actitud ególatra que no le permite ver que frente a él hay otro cuya huella es muy distinta de aquella de Sherlock Holmes. Esa huella del otro es, para Levinas, una huella que perturba el orden del mundo (en lugar de ordenarlo, de sistematizarlo, y de dar respuesta a las inquietudes existenciales) al mismo tiempo que duplica la significación del signo. Esa huella remarca también, según este autor, lo que permanece en la sombra, lo que excede y que por lo tanto debe ser cortado, mutilado, fragmentado, pues no cabe en presencia alguna. Es además una prueba de que el lenguaje ha dejado de ser representativo dado que ella, la huella del otro, significa fuera de toda intención de significar porque el signo no logra apresarla sino que la convierte en el eco de una ausencia y en la posibilidad de una tercera dirección de no rectitud radical que escapa al juego bipolar de la inmanencia y de la trascendencia.

Ese juego bipolar implica la creación de un realidad en la que imperan las jerarquías las cuales es posible encontrar dentro de géneros literarios como el de la novela de detectives (inocente/culpable, víctima/victimario).

Sin embargo se puede hablar no sólo de ese género sino también de la poesía, de la palabra. En su libro *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* Julia Kristeva analiza la teoría de Bakhtin. Ella menciona que él considera a "the literary word more as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings" (Kristeva, 50). Ese diálogo implica una polivalencia y una duplicación que él identifica con lo poético, en donde la unidad no existe y no

hay un significado fijo. Lo contrario sucede, por ejemplo, en la épica en la que el diálogo se cancela y se reduce al monólogo, de ahí que se recurra en ese caso a un narrador omnisciente cuya versión de los hechos pretende ser objetiva e imponerse (como en un monólogo) sobre las demás voces a las cuales silencia. Para Bakhtin en la épica de occidente "the subject both assumes and submits to the rule of one (...), the dialogue inherent in all discourse is smothered by a prohibition, a censorship, such as the discourse refuses to talk back upon itself, to enter into dialogue with itself" (Kristeva, 23). Ese diálogo que el texto rechaza tener consigo mismo es importante pues mediante él se escapa a la linealidad, una linealidad (relacionada con lo causal y teleológico) la cual limita y circunscribe y hace que el hombre pierda su totalidad, se fragmente. Sin embargo, hay una necesidad de buscar significado más allá de los límites de la razón. Y precisamente "the breaking of genres (poetry, narrative and so on) isolates the protective zones of the subject who normally cannot totalize the set of signifying procedures" (Kristeva, 38). Esa ruptura de géneros que rompe los límites y las zonas de protección que el sujeto cartesiano se ha construido ponen en evidencia el hecho de que "any (...) linear and specific reconstruction seems narrow, penal, penalizing and reductive of at least one of the lines that are competing to sever, complement and open themselves" (Kristeva, 60). Esas líneas que compiten por abrirse paso incluyen las voces de distintos autores y narradores las cuales pueden compartir un mismo espacio y dialogar dentro de él.

Dicho diálogo es una muestra de cómo, a través de la escritura, se logra plasmar lo complejo de realidad, y en particular lo complejo que es el ser humano y su condición que por lo mismo no puede ser encasillada, estereotipada, sino que por el contrario debe ser liberada y debe permitirse que se manifieste en todas sus diferentes dimensiones. De ahí que sea difícil, si no es que imposible, hablar de una verdad absoluta (del tipo de la que se habla, en una novela dedetectives) sino que ahora debemos hablar de un concierto de voces que buscan todas armonizar en un mismo espacio.

En lo que se refiere a *La muerte me da*, en ella el tema de la verdad absoluta y del concierto de voces está íntimamente ligado con el de la identidad. En este texto uno de los personajes afirma: "No sé en realidad quién soy". (Rivera Garza, 78). "Mi nombre no soy yo". (Rivera Garza, 92). Eso significa que la cuestión de la

identidad aún no está resuelta, y no lo está porque es un asunto muy complejo, que, en Occidente, está determinado por lo social (como lo muestra Lacan en su teoría) más que por el individuo mismo. Esa complejidad hace que el reflejo de ese sujeto en el espejo sea distorsionado, tal como lo indica también Lacan al hablar de la segunda fase por la que pasa el sujeto en la construcción de su yo. A través de esa construcción se elaboran metáforas tranquilizadoras cuyo principal símbolo es el hogar, un hogar, que, según se explica en esta novela de Cristina Rivera Garza, es molde, seguridad, protección. Sin embargo dicha seguridad, como lo afirman los posmodernistas, es sólo una fantasía esquizofrénica, una clase de utopía imposible de alcanzar. Esa inaccesibilidad es símbolo de una falta, de una ausencia, de algo que no se tiene y que se añora, se desea y se quiere: "¿Quién querría un pene? Alguien que no lo tiene (...) Tal vez estoy hablando de la envidia que no es tan famosa (...) Un hombre que quiere recuperar algo que es suyo". (Rivera Garza, 145) Sin embargo, esa recuperación es imposible pues, considera Lacan, una vez que se ha superado la etapa de lo real no es posible regresar. Contrario a lo que sucede con Ulises, quien sí puede volver a su hogar, que es Ítaca, al sujeto posmoderno no le es permitido retornar a sus orígenes, a su arché, término griego que se traduce al castellano como principio. Ese no retorno perturba al sujeto que, como tabla de salvación, intenta estructurar su mundo con base en jerarquías, que dan paso a la creación de estereotipos. No obstante, y a pesar de la seguridad que ellos brindan, el sujeto posmoderno busca alejarse de eso, "Buscaba un lugar donde no lo reconocieran como la mitad de una unidad... Una mítica media naranja." (Rivera Garza, 264). El hablar de una mítica media naranja significa que al sujeto se le reconoce solamente no por sí mismo (con una identidad propia) sino en términos de una jerarquía (esposo/esposa, hijo/hija, etc.) de la cual ese sujeto anhela alejarse. En esa jerarquía se da prioridad a uno de los dos elementos el cual actúa como un centro que controla la relación y determina la identidad de ambos. Pero, como se afirma en esta novela, "todo centro cuando es centro está vacío". (Rivera Garza, 85) Ese vacío, ese hueco, es indicativo de la soledad del sujeto, de su narcisismo así como de su falta de identificación con el otro, al cual aparta de sí para poder él brillar y reafirmar su propia identidad (diferir, metáfora del sol, heliográfica, masculina, que busca apartar (diferir, posponer, en términos derrideanos) lo diferente, lo que, como la luna al sol, lo opaca y ensombrece. Ese otro que es diferente y con el cual el sujeto occidental no se identifica aparece en esta obra en la prosa

de pizarnik la cual "funda el lugar del otro", es "un ejercicio de otredad", así como una "posibilidad de enlazarse a lo de afuera" (Rivera Garza, 187). Ese afuera es aquello que no cabe en el centro ocupado por el yo, un yo ególatra que no quiere ser desplazado por nadie. Sin embargo, la prosa de pizarnik rebasa las fronteras impuestas por ese centro y su texto se convierte en "la desmesura de un texto sin yo", (Rivera Garza, 187) en donde se corteja la ajenidad. Esa ajenidad, esa otredad, a la que se refiere también Levinas, es ignorada por el sujeto cartesiano, quien la hace a un lado y la "elimina", de ahí que en Occidente "we are all killers of others" (Rivera Garza, 75). Para no matar a ese otro, para ignorarlo, deberíamos, según Cristina Rivera Garza, escuchar, y "para escuchar es necesario estar fuera de uno, fuera de sí." Para escuchar hay que realizar "un movimiento interior que va hacia afuera". (Rivera Garza, 77). En ese movimiento hay "un pronombre ausente que viaja de ti hacia mí y de mí hacia ti". (Rivera Garza, 78). Levinas explica que ese viaje conlleva implicaciones morales; en particular la responsabilidad por el otro, a través del cual puedo llegar a comprender el mundo en su complejidad e incluso el sentido o el significado de mi propia muerte: "La muerte en segunda persona, la muerte de alguien cercano que es la experiencia filosófica privilegiada porque es tangencial a dos personas allegadas. Es la más parecida a la mía, y sin ser para nada la muerte impersonal y anónima del fenómeno social". (Rivera Garza, 99). Ese otro, que no debe ser, por tanto, demonizado pues a través vivimos una experiencia privilegiada, nos dice: "no debes temerme", (Rivera Garza, 80), "ya basta de tener miedo". (Rivera Garza, 84). En consecuencia, lo que no debe haber es miedo sino un "reconocimiento total. Tú soy yo. Yo soy tú. Biunívoca". (Rivera Garza, 154). Cuando ese reconocimiento no se produce siempre hay un victimario y una víctima "siempre femenina", lo cual representa un regreso a las jerarquías. Y esa víctima es femenina porque "No hay forma gramatical adecuada para masculinizar a la víctima". (Rivera Garza, 228). Esa superioridad del hombre sobre la mujer, ese poderío, en términos lacanianos, castra al sujeto, lo divide, lo fragmenta y le impide ser, en esencia, Uno. Por otra parte "la castración le permite al sujeto tomar a los otros como otro en lugar de como lo mismo". (Rivera Garza, 346). Es decir, le impide superar su egolatría y lo lleva a ignorar todo lo demás, en particular aquello que se localiza en la periferia. Esa separación tajante entre el yo y el otro fragmenta, rompe. De ahí que en *La muerte me da* haya una referencia constante a que "todo está roto, partido en dos. Desmembrado". (Rivera Garza, 87). Se

habla de la navaja, de la cicatriz producida por un corte, de hombres desmembrados así como de "una dispersión total: sólo fragmentos que vienen desde la nada" (Rivera Garza, 196). Esa nada representa "grieta, punto vacío, amputación". (Rivera Carza, 156). En esa amputación, en esa castración "había algo (...) que (...) obligaba a pensar en el pligro personal, en la amenaza contra el propio cuerpo. Una escena primigenia. El miedo funcional". (Rivera Garza, 209). ESa escena primigenia, ese miedo fundacional, tiene que ver, en términos ontológicos, con la esencia del ser, con el origen, con lo real lacaniano, etapa a la que, según este teórico, no se puede regresar una vez que se ha salido de ella. De ahí la necesidad de otra etapa, la de lo simbólico. Gracias a ella el sujeto se construye una armazón que lo protege en contra de esa mutilación y le da una sensación (si bien falsa, según los teóricos posmodernos) de unidad. Al darse cuenta de que dicha creencia en el Uno no es cierto tanto hombres como mujeres se preparan, dentro de la novela, para enfrentar esa nueva circunstancia amenazadora y terrorífica: "Los jóvenes buscarían, y eventualmente encontrarían nuevas maneras de proteger los genitales (...) Algunas mujeres aprovecharían las nuevas cuotas de poder para transformarse a sí mismas en leyendas vivas (...) Otras, las menos, interesarían asegurar por todos los medios que no albergaban fantasías castrantes (...) Nadie les creería, por supuesto (...). Las castraciones, por tanto, continúan y en el texto se describen "las fotografías de los perdiódicos... los desechos, los fragmentos, las rutinas miserables de un cuerpo". (Rivera Garza, 233). Esos desechos, esas ruinas, son el producto de una serie de asesinatos (producto de castraciones) que son el eje de la trama en *La muerte me da*, que se convierte así, entre otras cosas, en una novela policiaca. Dichos asesinatos son investigados por una detective quien "tiene que ver los datos como una unidad completa". (Rivera Garza 105). Ella, al estilo de Sherlock Holmes, tendrá que encontrar al culpable, a un culpable. Cuestión de homogeneidad y no de pluralidad, para usar términos posmodernos. El hecho de que las víctimas de castración sean hombres y quien lo investiga lo acontecido sea una mujer plantea una cuestión interesante: el hecho de que hay diversas estrategias que es posible emplear para hilvanar la narración de una utopía, la cual crea espacios para la resolución de conflictos. En lo que respecta al texto de Cristina Rivera Garza, ahí se busca demostrar que en Occidente las utopías han sido elaboradas, han sido estructuradas y controladas, como diría Lacan, por el padre y su ley. Esa es la metáfora tranquilizadora que ese padre ha elaborado



para calmar sus propias angustias. Sin embargo, dentro de esa metáfora tranquilizadora, que pretende abarcar una realidad total, la cual al final, como ya se ha visto, se fragmenta en pedazos. A través de esos fragmentos, que fracturan la realidad total y dejan espacios vacíos los cuales se pueden retomar para crear hilvanar otra historia y crear una nueva utopía, ahora desde una nueva perspectiva: la femenina. Como parte de esa nueva perspectiva en *La muerte me da* ahora hay una reescritura esa novela de detectives en la que se va en busca de una verdad absoluta. Pero esa reescritura se va elaborando poco a poco, paso a paso por lo que en un principio la misma detective va en busca de esa verdad absoluta. Ella "sabe los nombres de los muertos y recuerda sus rostros, pero para poder trabajar en sus casos necesita llamarlos uno, dos, tres, cuatro. Clasifica, enumera, mastica." (Rivera Garza, 104). Esa clasificación, esa estructuración, gira en un principio, alrededor de la ley del padre y de lo absoluto. La detective estructura, clasifica, trabaja "siguiendo posibles pistas" (Rivera Garza, 226) y teniendo, tal vez "los celos como móvil". (Rivera Garza, 226). "Tratarían de establecer un perfil del asesino" (Rivera Garza, 241) y de interrogar a los sospechosos para ver si tienen una coartadas. No obstante, al final de cuentas las pistas no conducen a nada definitivo, los sospechosos "todos tendrían coartadas", (Rivera Garza, 242) toda "hipótesis resultaba inútil" (Rivera Garza, 226) y no ayuda a resolver los crímenes. Al final de cuentas, el mundo seguía siendo el mismo, continuaba siendo un mundo "donde la detective volvería a fracasar, esta vez con bombo y platillo, en todos los encabezados de los periódicos vespertinos". (Rivera Garza, 234). Esa derrota, es términos ontológicos, es una derrota del ser, de su esencia real (la cual resulta imposible recuperar dentro de lo simbólico, dentro del universo regido por el logos), es una derrota de esa búsqueda de una verdad absoluta, que es la del nombre del culpable. Que en este caso sería la culpable, pues ahora los papeles de víctima y victimario de han revertido y resulta que quien es castrado es el hombre y quien castra es la mujer cuando lo que comúnmente ocurre, según Lacan, es lo contrario. Esa contradicción es una evidencia de que la utopía construida por la ley del padre ha sido reestructurada y su entramado se ha reconstruido tomando ahora como centro de una nueva utopía a lo femenino, que en este momento actúa como un ser castrante y no castrado. Esto significa que la detective fracasa en el logro de su objetivo que es el de descubrir, de manera absoluta y sin rastro de duda, la verdad sobre lo ocurrido. Pero ese rastro de duda, esa huella (como la nombran los posmodernos) que deja

duda impide que el misterio se resuelva de manera absoluta y total. De ahí que a la detective encargada de resolver estos crímenes se le describa como alguien que “no se había caracterizado por solucionar sus casos sin rapidez ni sin ella pero escribía largos informes repletos de preguntas y detalles que agradaban el sentido estético del jefe (...) Hablaban (...) de series de tv donde hombres y mujeres que no lucían para nada como ellos resolvían, con gran sentido del deber y una condición física envidiable, casos estridentes y de relevancia internacional. (...) Y luego, ya dentro de su oficina, se ponía a hojear papeles y a garabatear posibles rastros a seguir o conclusiones, en su turno, imposibles”. (Rivera Garza, 214). Para ella “la hipótesis resultaba inútil”. (Rivera Garza, 226). No hay razón (logos) o razonamiento (deductivo o inductivo) que sirva. De ahí la recriminación: “Nunca pudiste encontrar evidencias (...) un caso tan brutal y tú son evidencias. Ni motivo. Ni arma. Ni pene. Nada. Eso es lo que produjo tu investigación. Nada”. (Rivera Garza, 263). Entonces “la detective está punto de llorar o de partirse en dos o de deshacerse en mil pedazos”. (Rivera Garza, 115). Esa fragmentación, contraria a la idea del Uno y signo de pluralidad, es un leit motif que recorre toda esta obra de Rivera Garza. Se menciona ahí, en esa novela, que esa escisión y heterogeneidad son una muestra de “el lenguaje como imposibilidad de presencia y como ausencia”. (Rivera Garza, 55). Como consecuencia de esa imposibilidad y de esa ausencia, causada por la imposición de lo simbólico y de la ley del padre, “ahora la palabra es sólo una ligerísima concatenación de letras, apenas una cadena de sonidos, una desmembración en ciernes, sin unidad, sin completud”. (Rivera Garza, 108). Esa palabra sin completud, que no es total, que no se ha cerrado a otras posibilidades y que da paso a la pluralidad y a la otredad es parte de “una escritura que problematiza”, (Rivera Garza, 185) que violenta “hasta el límite la intensidad expresiva del lenguaje”. (Rivera Garza, 186). De ahí el papel importante que la prosa de Pizarnik desempeña en el entramado de esta novela. Dicha prosa “corta con frecuencia los hilos del significado del lenguaje a través de líneas o párrafos que toman la forma de fragmentos. La estructura que congrega a estas partículas textuales responde más a las yuxtaposiciones espaciales de un collage que a las sucesiones temporales o lógicas de un relato”. (Rivera Garza, 184). Ese collage es el mismo al que hace referencia Bajtín cuando habla de un diálogo entre diferentes escrituras, una intersección de superficies textuales, entre las cuales se encuentra, además de Cristina Rivera Garza y Anne-Marie Blanco, Pizarnik. Todas ellas, y en particular Pizarnik,

son importantes al momento de tratar de descifrar el misterio al que se enfrenta la detective. "Pizarnik es la clave. Sin leerla, sin leerla bien, nunca podrás dar con el culpable".

(Rivera Garza, 173). Hay que leer a Pizarnik con cuidado, sin olvidar que "el que lee con cuidado descuartiza." La respuesta que se da a esto en la novela es: "leeré estos textos tratando de escapar expresamente del retrato romántico y estereotípico de la poeta suicida obsesionada por el dolor y la muerte". (Rivera Garza, 181). Al hacer a un lado los estereotipos se aclara el enigma que tanto ha inquietado a la detective: el nombre de quien perpetró esos asesinatos. "Un nombre que es muchos nombres escondidos. Un nombre que no quiere ser asociado a nada concreto todavía... ¿sabes lo que eso significa? (...) significa que el nombre, el otro, el escondido, el original si cabe el término, no quiere ser enunciado... eso significa. Que no quiere que la encontremos". (Rivera Garza, 349). El nombre no quiere ser encontrado, se esconde y juega al gato y al ratón. Ese juego, ese aspecto lúdico, descentra al sujeto, le da movilidad de ahí que no sea posible ubicarlo. Esa movilidad y ese descentramiento del sujeto resultan ser elementos clave de esta novela ya que a través de ellos se crean fisuras que permiten la creación de una nueva utopía, que en este caso se mueve alrededor de la figura femenina que aquí aparece más que como víctima como victimaria, como agresora, como castradora. Ese nuevo poder adquirido por la mujer pone en evidencia la necesidad de tomar en cuenta a la periferia, la necesidad de acabar con el silencio y de escuchar todas las voces, no sólo la de aquellos que ocupan el poder sino también la de los que están fuera de este. Y ahí es precisamente en donde radica el principal mérito de esta novela de Cristina Rivera Garza: el haber cuestionado, de manera magistral, el logocentrismo, el haber cuestionado esas metáforas tranquilizadores creadas por Occidente y en las cuales la ley del padre se impone imponiendo sobre la mujer y la periferia el papel de víctima, un papel, que según este texto, ya no representará más.

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# Lo anterior: Desde la periferia de las palabras

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Gabriela Riveros

## Abstract

Se argumenta que *Lo anterior*, novela escrita por Cristina Rivera Garza, es novela de "cruce de fronteras"; es narrativa y es poesía, nos remite una historia de amor que es y que no es, una historia que se resiste a ser contada, a ser atrapada por las palabras. Se destaca que esta obra de Rivera Garza es un desafío, es la aventura de reinventar, de reconstruir mediante el proceso de escritura y de lectura una novela que "no-vele".

This paper argues that Cristina Rivera Garza's *Lo Anterioris* a border-crossing novel, traversing the boundaries of narrative and poetry, that presents a love story that is and is not to be. A story that resists telling, and a story that defies the boundaries of words. It is argues that this novel by Cristina Rivera Garza culminates in the art of reinvention and reconstruction through writing.

*El amor no se puede contar. El amor es inicuo. Está hecho de gestos anodinos y costumbres difíciles de cambiar. El amor son los años que pasan uno tras otro sin variar. En el desierto, el amor es una planicie donde no crece nada [...] El amor es lo que hay bajo la lengua cuando se seca y a un lado de los pasos cuando no se oyen. El amor es un sauce a orillas del cementerio de Venado [...]. El amor es una tonadilla, apenas una canción.*  
Cristina Rivera Garza, *Nadie me verá llorar* (168)

*Lo anterior*, novela de Cristina Rivera Garza publicada en el año 2004, nos arroja a las arenas movedizas de la frontera; no me refiero aquí a aquella delimitada por la política o la geografía sino a los sutiles territorios de lo subjetivo, lo intangible, de las posibilidades sugeridas por la imaginación del lector y de los personajes, de

tiempos y espacios que nos habitan en el inconsciente, de voces enterradas en la memoria. En *Lo anterior*, de la misma manera que en otras novelas de la autora, no hay lugar para la certeza, para verdades absolutas, para la redención que nos ofrecía el progreso: las voces que rondan la novela se instalan desde la colina del desencanto, desde el lugar donde vemos, de una vez y para siempre, que no ha quedado una sola columna de pie. La Historia (con mayúscula) se desvanece bajo las aguas de historias personales que suceden bajo esa frontera que es la piel, guarecidas por el silencio. El Sujeto con su identidad unificada se vuelve también un ser en constante transición entre el ser hombre o mujer, entre ser un personaje u otro, entre la gama de las posibilidades que el juego de la existencia y la escritura suponen. El Lenguaje también queda deconstruido; las palabras pierden su capacidad de significación, de referir una realidad determinada. Aquí se modifica la concepción de las palabras y el universo que éstas han de aprehender. El significado es una referencia inacabada, en transformación y sujeta a la mirada de quien cuenta la historia y del lector. El Tiempo y el Espacio se vuelven geografía interna que transgrede el carácter lineal del tiempo que todos compartimos -ese acompasado, artificial y sereno que es el tiempo predicado por el reloj.

*Lo anterior* es novela de "cruce de fronteras"; es narrativa y es poesía, nos remite una historia de amor que es y que no es, una historia que se resiste a ser contada, a ser atrapada por las palabras puesto que todo proceso amoroso...

no es más que una descomposición interna que reta cualquier capacidad explicativa del lenguaje. Si se da, si ocurre, el proceso es innumerable. Si se da, si ocurre, el proceso sólo podría ser descrito cabalmente con la palabra nada. Si se da, si ocurre, el proceso sólo puede existir después (entrevista a Cristina Rivera Garza, con Jorge Manguía).

*Lo anterior* es entonces un desafío, es la aventura de reinventar, de reconstruir mediante el proceso de escritura y de lectura una novela que "no-vele"; dice Cristina que una de las intenciones "es quitar a la novela su halo de perfección o de naturalidad con que se presenta" (Cristina Rivera Garza en entrevista con Erika P. Buzio). Tal vez la vocación de la novela debiera ser la de sugerir, invocar y, de ser posible, exhibir la parte del iceberg que no se ve, la historia de amor que mientras ocurre no es amor, porque ésta es sólo un conjunto de palabras, de sucesos, esperas,

anhelos, esperanzas que ocurren en la mente de los "enamorados". Estas fantasías sólo se convierten en amor desde el futuro, a veces en un amor tan doloroso como abstracto, cobijado por el recuerdo, acariciado en retrospectiva y finalmente, huidizo también. Quizá por eso los amorosos están condenados a esa soledad referida por Jaime Sabines "los amorosos andan como locos/ porque están solos, solos, solos" o por Pablo Neruda "es tan corto el amor y tan largo el olvido".

Si el amor es inasible, si es tan codiciado como escurridizo, entonces el reto de aprehender su naturaleza rebelde, de forzarlo al corsé de las palabras, al entramado de una historia, se convierte en tarea de contar la historia de lo imposible, la historia de la "no historia" que escapa a las posibilidades de la palabra misma. Será, más bien, en el halo del misterio, de ese aroma que evocan las palabras cuando germinan de la poesía, de la memoria, del erotismo, de esa realidad interna que nos grita desde el silencio, -que es el lenguaje con el que Cristina ha de construir su novela- será ahí en donde nosotros los lectores vislumbremos el amor y su contradictoria naturaleza. Luisa Valenzuela afirma al referir este "secreto": "El veneno que secreta aquello que se oculta [...] enferma a los humanos y alienta a la literatura." (Valenzuela 21).

"El amor siempre ocurre después, en retrospectiva. El amor es siempre una reflexión." (Rivera Garza 14) Esta frase, escrita en un papel rugoso guardado en el bolsillo del pantalón de un hombre que yace inconsciente en medio del desierto, se vuelve la punta de lanza desde donde parte la novela. Una mujer que hace fotografía, cuyo nombre no sabemos -a veces el narrador se refiere a ella como "la mujer de Otro Planeta"- encuentra a un hombre desvanecido al que el narrador se referirá como "el hombre del desierto" y que posiblemente se llama Ulises Ramírez Rubí. La mujer se lo lleva a su casa. Matilda Burgos -protagonista de la novela magistral de Cristina Nadie me verá llorar- también se encuentra con un hombre moribundo en su habitación (Cástulo Rodríguez) y Cristina Rivera Garza, nombre de la protagonista de la novela más reciente de la autora titulada La muerte me da descubre el cadáver castrado de un hombre joven acompañado por versos de Alejandra Pizarnik. Los tres personajes de las tres novelas, desde su estado inconsciente son seres exiliados de las palabras -salvo por el recado que todos llevan consigo. Y tanto Matilda como la Mujer de otro Planeta se apartan del "mundo real", bullicioso,

ordenado por rutinas, por trabajo, por parientes, para encerrarse a cuidar de un hombre. Esa experiencia, a la que se sienten atraídas sin explicación alguna y por la que ponen en riesgo su vida- las enfrenta al silencio. Ambas mujeres habrán de transformarse tras dicho encuentro porque como enuncia el narrador de Nadie me verá llorar: "el silencio es la burla perfecta de la razón" (Rivera Garza). Esa vivencia arroja a los personajes a un tiempo y un espacio subjetivo que se dilata y se contrae a voluntad de la imaginación, del azar, el inconsciente, los sueños... Frente al silencio y aislados del mundo brota el universo interno, la luz tenue de la resolana, los sonidos del viento, el río de voces, de presencias inquietantes que los obligan a descubrir nuevos rostros de sí mismos, de los otros, secretos a punto de ser develados.

Este desvanecimiento del Sujeto tradicional es uno de los aspectos principales en la obra de la autora. Los personajes masculinos, el médico, El Hombre del Restaurante De La Esquina, Ulises Ramírez, Juan Muñoz, el Hombre del Desierto se vuelven seres fronterizos, siluetas de hombres que son uno y todos, voces, miradas y deseos que se multiplican en círculos concéntricos, como una piedra que ha caído en un estanque, y deja al lector la interpretación de ese eco. En la novela *Lo anterior*, al igual que en *La cresta de Ilión* y en *La muerte me da* los personajes aparecen desenraizados de su contexto, desenterrados de una patria, de un nombre propio, de familia, amigos, del amor de pareja. Deambulan como extranjeros de su propia identidad ya que esta se vuelve una abstracción mutable. Las características de los personajes se tocan entre sí y se fusionan, de tal manera que no hay frontera entre uno y otro. Es por eso que el médico se cuestiona si el contacto con la mujer lo convierte en un ser de otro mundo... y lo que es más, este narrador cuestiona la artificiosa construcción de los géneros tradicionales -varón y mujer- que obedecen a la ley patriarcal "Esta es la historia [...] de una mujer contando la historia de un hombre que es sólo una mujer" (Rivera Garza 161) "Esta historia contiene el desvanecimiento de un hombre" (Rivera Garza 164).

El personaje femenino, al igual que la Matilda de *Nadie me verá llorar*, es una mujer amada por un hombre que es incapaz de aprehenderla y de comunicarse con ella. Los personajes masculinos son espectadores que se erosionan en la espera "sin dejar de seguirla con la mirada, sin dejar de saber que ella está afuera de su casa, afuera de su abrazo, entera y humana con un sombrero" (Rivera



Garza 67). La mujer no le dice ni siquiera su nombre, reduce su relación a la palabra "nada" y lo mira "sin ninguna piedad" (Rivera Garza 72).

El médico incluso se vuelve dependiente de ella, anhela volver a la "habitación de las palabras" porque ahí la mujer reelabora historias a partir de las palabras, pone las suyas en su boca y en su pensamiento; se convierte en su ventrilocuo. "Una voz que quería hacerse pasar por otra voz —murmura o ensueña. Una voz sin sujeto o que se quería sin sujeto" (Rivera Garza 150).

Otras veces, la mujer imagina otras posibilidades de ser. Eso nos remite a que, por instantes, somos lo que no somos: una hipótesis, un ego experimental, una posibilidad. Además, al estilo de Borges o Lewis Carroll, se menciona que los personajes existen solo porque otro ser los imagina o los sueña, hablan porque otro habla: son seres exiliados de su propia presencia y de sus palabras: ventrílocuos.

Por lo tanto, desde el primer capítulo titulado "Lo único cierto" se abre, no sólo la historia ya referida del hallazgo del hombre en el desierto, sino que se arroja el dado para iniciar el juego y, antes de caer en el tablero, descubrimos ya el abanico de cuestionamientos que irán germinando a lo largo del relato. Cristina Rivera Garza estructura estas interrogantes a partir de la deconstrucción de la tradición occidental que ha polarizado el mundo en dos: en fuerte y débil, bueno y malo, ricos y pobres, blanco y negro, varón y mujer, verdadero y falso, en sí y no. Derrida sostiene que la razón ha sido moldeada por una búsqueda deshonesto de la certeza, a la que él llama logocentrismo. (Derrida, citado en Appignanesi y Garrat 77). La interpretación patriarcal ha moldeado a su conveniencia y su criterio la organización social y ha legitimado todas sus acciones mediante instituciones de poder, culturas, tabúes, argumentos científicos, violencia, leyes y sistemas económicos. Esto sólo puede sostenerse mediante la malicia de reprimir o excluir lo incierto, lo diferente, lo otro -en pocas palabras, lo que durante siglos ha sobrevivido desde la periferia.

En las novelas de Cristina Rivera Garza, como diría Keizman, "se desarticulan los binomios fáciles". La razón y la locura conviven, lo imaginario y lo real, las palabras velan realidades y el silencio las exhibe, los sueños parecen verdaderos y la vigilia delirante, el mundo

externo está modulado por el interno y ambos se fusionan en imágenes y palabras -por ejemplo, cuando el médico reflexiona sobre si es posible encontrar a un hombre moribundo en el desierto y mientras revisa a una paciente, ella le dice: "Se me ocurre a veces, doctor, la idea de echarme bajo la sombra de un árbol o de algo. La idea de echarme a morir" (Rivera Garza 44). Esta frase del mundo externo recoge también el conflicto interno. "Esta historia es insoportable" "Lo insoportable es que esto no es una historia" (Rivera Garza 91).

"Mi reto era, y continúa siendo, el crear contextos flexibles que se transforman a la par que los sucesos. El tiempo, en estos casos, tiene que transformarse en un personaje central del texto ..."

"cada elemento de la ecuación está ligeramente fuera de su lugar. Me interesa ese punto de partida, esa oblicuidad" (Rivera Garza, citado en Carrera y Keizman, 158).

En esta oblicuidad que refiere la autora, este hueco, esa grieta, esa sombra, esa nostalgia evocada por el sentido no abarcado, por el halo no enunciado, es ahí en donde está implicado el lector, la poesía, la plurisignificación, el secreto, el abismo, el vértigo, el silencio, la propuesta estética del lenguaje que Lo anterior reinventa.

A partir del capítulo cuarto, estructuralmente la mitad de la novela, titulado "Ventriloquist looking at a double interior, 1988" se narra el después, el territorio donde ocurrirá el amor. Sabemos esto porque cada fragmento está referido con las palabras "Dice que". El personaje supone que en un futuro esa historia será evocada, será remitida en retrospectiva -tal vez por El Hombre del Restaurante de la Esquina o Juan Muñoz y La Mujer Enamorada- y por ello advierte que quien la escuche o lea no podrá revivirla porque esta ocurre al margen del lenguaje. Su destino será meramente el del ventrílocuo, el de reproducir las palabras de otro.

Me ve anotar palabras mientras habla y sobre todo, mientras calla, y me lo pide casi de inmediato. Me pide que, si mi intención es transcribir su habla, poner su habla por escrito, no intente calcarla. Ése es el primer error, dice. Dice que esto no se puede doblar o copiar o reproducir. Luego dice, con tristeza, con abandono, con estridente indiferencia, que la palabra escrita siempre es una traición de la palabra hablada, la cual ya estaba, desde

el inicio, muerta. [...] una muerte doble. Una muerte doblemente muerta.

Dice: si quieres hacer un documento de mi habla, de mi habla que es sólo este no poder recordar algo que no olvido, entonces tendrás que usar al inicio de todas tus oraciones el "dice que" (Rivera Garza 121).

La palabra implica ese terco afán por dar forma al pensamiento, por enunciar una sola cosa a la vez, por desenredar el cúmulo de sensaciones, desmembrarlas, desarticularlas para forzarlas al molde del signo lingüístico, la sintaxis, la gramática, por ordenarlo todo en una linealidad casi perversa... En un instante diminuto y preciso, un individuo escucha, habla, divaga, recuerda, evoca, siente, muestra, esconde, desea, sueña... Lo simultáneo es la realidad del ser humano... La palabra siempre será ajena a esta posibilidad... Intentar poner en palabras un instante raya en la frontera de lo imposible, pisa el terreno de lo artificioso y la fantasía... y ese es ya el reino de lo literario.

El capítulo quinto titulado "Antefuturo" narra desde distintas voces y puntos de vista la escena de la mujer que hace fotografía y del hombre en el desierto hasta reducirlos a un escucha y un escribiente, a un par de esculturas nocturnas. "Después" es el nombre del sexto y último capítulo, es el futuro, el tiempo y espacios desde donde se evoca el amor: un monólogo interior que representa el vano intento de conversación entre el hombre del desierto y la mujer.

Sólo se puede explorar el antes desde el punto de vista del después (Rivera Garza. 70). La historia de amor no ha de concretarse hasta que sea evocada desde el futuro, por la memoria, por el deseo, por la nostalgia, por el cuerpo, por la escritura. Cada capítulo o fragmento es una pregunta más que da un vuelco entero al texto y lo resignifica, reinterpreta, lo cuestiona, arroja nuevos matices sobre la palabra y la existencia.

En *Lo anterior* importan los hechos que duermen en la periferia, lo íntimo se vuelve el centro puesto que lo más importante para el ser humano no está en el mundo que vemos y tocamos. Tengo la firme creencia de que la vocación de la literatura contempla el materializar los estados internos, cristalizar esa riqueza... registrar aquello que no tiene nombre... el vértigo que sugiere la muerte,

el amor, el sueño... esos instantes en que descubrimos un movimiento, una mueca, una mirada, una sombra, un roce que nos paraliza y detiene el tiempo... la literatura como un lienzo en donde aparecen los laberintos que nos habitan sin saberlo.

Desde la perplejidad en que nos deja el amor cuando nos toca... desde esta fisura entre el secreto y la literatura, la palabra y la poesía, la locura y la razón, la memoria y el olvido... desde esta herida que implica la derrota de la palabra, Cristina Rivera Garza construye su novela *Lo anterior* a partir de una magistral propuesta estética del lenguaje para beneplácito de la narrativa hispana y de nosotros, sus lectores.

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# A Murmuring of Walls: Mur Mursby Agnès Varda

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## Abstract

*Mur Murs*, documental de la directora francesa Agnes Varda acerca de los murales de Los Angeles se trata tanto de los murales y muralistas como de la ciudad misma, ciudad que colinda con México y con el océano pacífico, ciudad que cuenta con una vasta población de origen mexicano. Los murales y el documental hacen audibles las voces vitales y coloridas de las comunidades marginalizadas en una expresión artística transeúnte y pública que invita a los angeleños y a la audiencia global del documental a un diálogo con el arte, la política, la identidad, la historia y la violencia, en una ciudad saturada por medios de comunicación y dónde es particularmente difícil ser visible. Los murales encarnan las líneas divisorias y marcan territorios, en particular los barrios mexicanos donde los siempre presentes murales llegan a ser un trasfondo constante de la vida callejera. Agnes Varda, en esta obra a la vez subjetiva y universal, hace que las paredes hablen y que cuenten sus historias en múltiples capas y desde múltiples ángulos, a sabiendas borrando las fronteras entre el adentro y el afuera, lo espacial y lo abstracto, el movimiento y la quietud, el objeto y el sujeto. Juega, como los murales mismos, un juego constante de *trompe-l'oeil* con su audiencia, explorando así la cuestión de la representación y de la frontera entre la realidad y la ilusión.

*Mur Murs*, a 1980 documentary film by French director Agnès Varda about the murals of Los Angeles, is as much about the murals as the muralists, its viewers and the city of Los Angeles itself, a city bordering the Pacific and the Mexican frontier, and with a vast Mexican-American population. The murals and the film make visible the vital and colorful voices of marginalized communities and individuals in a transient, anti-commercial, public art form that engages Angelenos, and beyond the global audience of the film, into a dialogue with art, politics, identity, history and violence, in a media-

saturated city where it is especially hard to be visible. The murals embody dividing lines and mark territories, in particular Mexican-American neighborhoods where ubiquitous murals are a constant background to street life. Agnès Varda, in this at once highly subjective and universal work, makes the walls speak and tell their stories in multiple layers and from multiple angles, deliberately blurring borders between the outside and inside, the spatial and abstract, movement and stillness, object and subject, playing, like the murals themselves, a constant game of *trompe-l'oeil* with the audience, ultimately exploring the question of representation, and the border between reality and illusion.

This paper aims to re-visit a 1980 documentary on Los Angeles's murals by French filmmaker Agnès Varda, a major French documentary and fiction director and photographer who has directed some 45 documentaries and fiction films since the mid-1950s. *Mur Murs* was her second feature-length documentary "on the murals of Los Angeles, that is paintings on the walls of the city. Who paints them. Who pays for them. Who looks at them. How this city, which is the capital of cinema, and its inhabitants, are revealed without special effects, through its murmuring walls" (Varda 258). An unknown and/or forgotten film in the United States<sup>7</sup>, the documentary is a journey through the various neighborhoods of Los Angeles through hundreds of murals painted by more than 70 muralists, which speak about the city, its geography and its people from a multiplicity of angles -- artistic, social, human, ethnic, geographical, political, historical and prophetic; a multiplicity true to the reality of the city.

What does this film, made by a French director some 25 years ago on murals in Los Angeles, have to say about the U.S.-Mexico border?

First, Agnès Varda, as a French filmmaker, has an outsider point of view, which allows her to be a privileged and trusted

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7 For example, SPARC, Los Angeles's premier institution for carrying out mural programs, including preserving them, does not mention the film on its website archive, though its co-founder and current artistic director Judy Baca, and the murals she directed or painted feature prominently in Varda's documentary.

witness<sup>8</sup>, for she has no stake in local politics or economics, rather she questions art and notably filmmaking through the muralists, the murals, and the people who live amidst them. The temporal distance – 25 years – gives the murals, some of which still exist, some of which have disappeared, an aura at once impermanent and eternal, as they have been fixed on film.

The murals of Los Angeles, “the mural capital of the world” (Cockroft and Bernet-Sánchez 16), treated from Agnès Varda’s French, documentarian and artistic perspective are particularly interesting to speak about the US-Mexican border, as muralism is a public art form which was first revived in Mexico and then among Mexican-Americans in the United States as part of the Chicano movement at the end of the 1960s<sup>9</sup>. Thus it is an art form associated with Mexican-Americans, i.e. Mexicans who have crossed the US-Mexican border and live in the United States in a city, Los Angeles, which has had the largest Mexican-American community outside of Mexico City since 1940<sup>10</sup>. In fact, Los Angeles can be considered a giant border metropolis, as the 140 miles that separate it from the actual Mexican border are continuously urbanized.

Los Angeles is on the edge of another geographic and symbolic frontier, the Pacific – the end of the American continent and the mythic West. A frontier embodied at the beginning of *Mur*

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8 She notes (Varda 258-9): “Painters have been so much exploited (...), that they systematically say no to any type of film enterprise. Some, in Mexican neighborhoods for example, actually pull out and shoot machine guns; even when they aim at the sky, it is extremely intimidating! They’ve had enough of seeing their neighborhood invaded by movie directors who are always choosing their neighborhood to stage the most squalid scenes of their films, all the dirty tricks and other gangland killings... But I must say I have not encountered any kind of difficulty with them; all the painters reacted positively to the idea of making a film about their murals. The fact I was a foreigner certainly made things easier.”

9 For a history of muralism, in particular in California, see the various articles in Eva Sperling Cockroft and Holly Bernet-Sánchez, eds., *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals* (Venice, California: Social and Public Art Resource Center and Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1990)

10 In fact Los Angeles was called the Mexican capital of the US as early as 1930. See Gloria E. Miranda, “The Mexican Immigrant Family: Economic and Cultural Survival in Los Angeles, 1900-1945”, *20th Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion and Social Conflict*, ed. Norman M. Klein and Martin J. Schiesl (Claremont: Regina Books, 1990) 44.

*Murs* by a mural representing the Fall of Icarus where Icarus is at once an angel, a fallen cosmonaut, and a cowboy featured on the screen of a drive-in theatre in the middle of the desert. Varda's film ends on a mural depicting an apocalyptic vision of the great earthquake which is to hit California and separate it from the American continent, thus marking a new frontier.

1980, the year *Mur Murs* was made in, was a good time to take stock of the mural movement in Los Angeles after a first phase in the late 1960s and 1970s, when murals were closely associated with the Chicano movement and were used as a tool of political empowerment, popular education and consciousness raising. During the 1970s, muralism as a full-fledged art form spread on to the walls of every neighborhood in the city, acquiring a more complex and diverse aesthetics as well as growing recognition for muralists in the art world. Alongside muralism, other so-called alternative or underground art forms were developing in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s, as in poetry, independent cinema, or graphic arts<sup>11</sup>.

They were further stimulated at the end of the 1970s by the government-funded CETA program, which financed many artists, bringing about an art revival in a spirit close to that of the New Deal's in the 1930s. This was a generation of artists that laid the foundations for the coming of age of Los Angeles as cultural capital beyond Hollywood cinema, with its internationally recognized homegrown art.

How are these murals then, as they are filmed in Los Angeles in 1980 by Agnès Varda, revealing of the Mexican-American border in particular and of frontiers in general? These murals indeed are walls mirroring borders in all three basic meanings of the word<sup>12</sup>:

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11 For poetry, see Sophie Rachmuhl, *Los Angeles Speaks for Itself : Rise of a Poetry Scene 1950-1990* (Los Angeles: Otis Books/Seismicity Editions, forthcoming), for independent arts see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London, New York :Verso, 1990) and David E. James, ed., *The Sons and Daughters of Los, Culture and Community in L.A.* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2003).

12 According to the Free Online Dictionary, the definition of border is: ". A part that forms the outer edge of something. .A decorative strip around the edge of something, such as fabric. .A strip of ground, as at the edge of a garden or walk, in which ornamental plants or shrubs are planted. .The line or frontier area separating political divisions or geographic regions; a boundary."



they are ornamental, i.e. aesthetic; they lie on the margin, that is they are a favorite art form of the unrecognized and invisible; finally, they are a dividing line, spatial as well as imaginary.

*Mur Murs* opens onto a slow pan over a long wall covered with graffiti, over which the titles appear. To Agnès Varda, these are the original murals, "beautiful like paintings, signed by dozens of anonymous people on walls as long as mythic snakes." (MM, Varda). Elsewhere in the film we find that body tattoos, painted cars, "writing (one's name) on the wall" (MM, Willie Herrón) might all be designated as "murals", for "everything that one decorates to express one's ideas or feelings are called murals" (MM, Varda). As well as being individual, signed artists' artwork, whose names are whispered in the film as the various murals are shown, they are anonymous marks "meaning I exist and I leave a sign which designates me" (MM, Varda). Thus the colorful murals vibrantly painted onto the many walls of Los Angeles take on many forms, shapes and colors, underlined by the whispered names and the camera's movements, notably pans and close-ups picking up striking details. There are for example those painted faces staring at the passer-by/film viewer out of the walls, placed at the beginning of the film like sympathetic, tutelary figures looking after the humans living before them.

Agnès Varda right away defines her journey of discovery of the city of Los Angeles as different from the usual foreign tourist's thanks to her encounter with the city's murals:

In California, one can come and visit friends and smoke very sophisticated herbs. In Los Angeles, one can come and see angels walking on the Pacific waters (...). One can visit Hollywood's major studios. But what I mostly saw in Los Angeles were walls." (MM, Varda)

In the same way she first defines murals by what they are not, i.e. advertising billboards:

Mural like not commercial. These walls have nothing to sell. A billboard (...) needs to have a good location, it is effective, it smiles, wears make-up. Not a mural. (MM, Varda)

Yet several murals shown in *Mur Murs* have been commissioned by a business to be used as advertisements, the most striking of which being a long mural encircling an imposing Farmer

John meatpacking plant, depicting pigs in various frolicking postures in a pastoral idyllic setting, in stark contrast to the pig slaughtering actually being carried out inside. But even in this most extreme example where the painters are considered nameless employees, though they have spent many years working on the painting (one even dying on the job), Agnès Varda's interviewing of the artist, her comments, her filming of the mural, the accompanying music, all turn this gigantic mural enterprise into an artistic and a personal endeavor, that of the muralist. In the same way the other murals financed by businesses, whether it is a giant bride and groom for a bridal shop, an Italian square for an Italian ice cream store in Venice, a black and white mural reproducing a 19<sup>th</sup> century picture of a French family dinner for a restaurant, or a couple of bar owners standing in front of their bar in *trompe l'oeil*, these murals indeed have nothing to do with billboards, whose aesthetics are wholly submitted to their commercial aim. Here they are always the distinct, personal work of an artist whom we see and hear talk about his/her mural, which has become personalized as it is now part of the everyday environment of those who commissioned it and their customers.

Murals are a public art form; they are visible to all, they are in the street among the people. They are a way for unrecognized, invisible artists to bring their art to the community who are in everyday physical contact with it without having to seek it out. On the part of the viewer as much as the artist, murals make up for a lack of visibility and access to mainstream and art world exhibition and production networks. Richard Felix, a Mexican-American muralist who directed the painting of some 50 murals in the low-income housing complex of Estrada Courts in East Los Angeles, thus dreamt "of making the biggest open air art gallery in the world" (MM, Felix), while Judy Baca, the co-founder of SPARC and creator of the Great Wall of Los Angeles, "started painting murals because (she) realized (...) that (she) had never seen a Chicana in a museum and there would be probably very little opportunity for (her) to take (her) work and put it into the art establishment and so it seemed (for her) logical to bring (her) work to (her) own people." (MM, Baca).

Muralists often feel responsible to their community. Richard Wyatt Jr., an African-American muralist painting the walls of his former junior high school considers himself "a public image maker (whose) images deal with either family or the people that (he)

know(s)" (MM, Wyatt), who are, as Varda remarks "not white, but black, yellow and red" (MM, Varda). Most muralists feel they are part of a minority, whether ethnic or social, who are addressing their community with relevant subject matter. To Kent Twitchell, an Anglo muralist famous for his giant human figures, that minority is the artist, as he explains about a mural he painted for an unemployment office:

I decided to paint artists instead of the generally considered unemployed people. I painted them very large, so large as I could get them on the building (...). I believe that they deserve to be this height. At least in my mind, in the minds of some people in this culture, artists are relatively important although not so in generally recognized terms. (MM, Kent Twitchell)

Murals are "a sort of message to (the) community and to the outside world as to the conditions (...of) a minority in the United States" (MM, Willie Herrón). They mostly portray those that have been left out - whether they are artists, Chicanos, African-Americans, unemployed or just anonymous Angelenos - and express their history, their lives, their desires, their mythology, their oppression, celebrations, repression and violence. In short, it is "Art as collective expression of Life (or as an expression of Collective Life)" (Varda 147).

If the price to be paid to be visible is that murals are ephemeral, that they fade, are damaged, are cut up or hidden behind new buildings, as Varda shows throughout her documentary, whatever their state, what matters is that they are "vital works of art in a functioning environment" (MM, Terry Schoonhover), imbued in time and personal and collective stories - that of the mural's conception, its painting, its interaction with passers-by, its alterations, possible disappearance and even reappearance - all processes in time and space. By filming the murals, Agnès Varda hopes to make them "a little less ephemeral" (Varda 147). But in fact, transience and vulnerability to time and the outside world is an intrinsic part of the art of mural making:

The very ephemeral nature of the painting have a lot to do with wanting to do those pieces. In order to continue doing these murals, you have to accept that they fade, they get mutilated. That's part of the beauty of the piece, that fact that it does change. (MM, Terry Schoonhover)

Thus, muralism is a form of vital rebellion giving voice to minorities and those living in the margins of a society ruled by commercialism: "Muralists are not in galleries. They do not belong to the system of listed art, they are in the streets, where people are" (MM, Varda). In the same way, Varda as director of a documentary on those rebel-artists, and because, like them, she does not "belong to the system of listed cinema, either in Hollywood or in France," and because she goes "down the streets where people are to film them, (she is) part of their rebellion." She identifies as documentary auteur-film maker with the marginalized and rebellious muralists' position.

The marginalization of non-commercial art and artists is especially acute in film, a multi-million dollar making industry, and in Los Angeles, its world capital, an infinitely mythologized city where the omnipresence of Hollywood makes other arts and artists – especially non-commercial ones – hard to exist. In *Mur Murs*, when muralists (and with them Agnès Varda) do choose to portray Hollywood actors or movies, it is not to celebrate the film industry, but either to show its historical significance as a local industry (as in *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* showing Edison's discovery of the movie camera, the filming of a western or Charlie Chaplin as a World War II soldier), or to divert its star system to another use and symbolism (as in Kent Twitchell's portrayal of minor Hollywood actors), focusing on minor or television actors (as in Kent Twitchell's giant "Holy Trinity and the Virgin" where the Virgin is Jan Clayton (the mother in *Lassie*), God is Clayton Moore (the Lone Ranger), and Christ is Billy Gray (the son in *Father is the Best*), all famous 1950s tv series actors.

Because murals belong to the urban landscape, because they are usually painted onto big walls, often on whole buildings, because they use "large scale figures and dramatic spatial relationships (...) to (...) speak out loudly and clearly" (Platt 2), because they are a privileged art form for minorities and marginalized communities, murals embody both spatial and symbolic dividing lines between communities and territories, being as they are identity and cultural markers.

This is especially true in East Los Angeles, the Mexican-American neighborhood where muralism originated, brought from Mexico and revived as part of the Chicano movement. In *Mur Murs*,

Mexican-American barrios, muralists and murals are recurrent. Many different places in East Los Angeles, full of people and colorful murals are shown: a bar paying homage to the dead, those victims of territorial fights, marked on the walls by gangs' stylized initials; children playing at war among painted skeletons or waiting at a bus stop; Ramona Gardens or Estrada Courts, two low-income housing projects covered with the murals painted by their inhabitants; the Los Angeles River, parks, and downtown streets full of people and shops, among walls and buildings covered with murals. An old woman raised in East L.A though not Mexican-American, explains this ubiquity thus:

Well we never had murals until they came from the other side and then they brought their murals with them and their minds and their souls! It's so Latin to paint the walls! They paint everything, the sidewalk, the pipes, the front, the back, the up and down! That's how they tell you they're Mexican!

There are murals celebrating the dead, the living and Mexican-Americans as "descendants of the Aztecs or the Mayans or the Toltecas" (MM, Manuel Cruz), or showing "vatos (...) as big and strong and feel(ing) some pride". Some murals are collective, others individual, some are part of the Chicano movement, and are conceived as a popular art designed to communicate, and "express problems existing in the community" (MM, Josina Lanco-Starrels), others to keep the past "alive within us" (MM, Father John Santillan), or to "express this pressure that you feel inside" (MM, Willie Herrón) at not being able to "identify with the Mexican nation (...nor) with what is called an American" (MM, Father John Santillan). In short, to the Mexican-Americans, murals are a way of life, they are truly part of everyday environment and form a constant background to daily life.

In *Mur Murs*, murals are not exclusively a Mexican-American art form however; they have been appropriated by various other communities (blacks, whites, more incidentally Asians) and neighborhoods, in particular Venice, a multicultural location which is another thread running through the film, and on which the film opens and closes.

This multicultural dimension is nowhere better illustrated than in Judy Baca's Los Angeles Great Wall, the longest mural in the

world, bringing together historians and community members with artists and youths from different communities and ethnic groups, salaried on the Ceta program, to research and work on a mural about "the history of California, but it's the part of history that has been left out – the forgotten people, like the Asian people, the Chicanos, the blacks, and also women" (MM, Baca). The half-mile long mural, which was eventually finished in 1983 (it started in 1976), is shown being painted in 1980 by youths and Judy Baca, while the camera pans over the unfinished wall to show to the American and foreign film viewer Los Angeles's visual history from the point of view of its diverse minorities, "a monument to interracial harmony (...) as methods were developed to work across the differences of race and class" (Baca quoted in Sandoval, 89)

*Mur Murs*, through its traveling among murals and muralists succeeds in portraying Los Angeles, a city hard to pin down because of its huge centrifugal multi-centered layout ("an archipelago of social and ethnic islands" as Carey McWilliams famously said<sup>13</sup>), the extreme diversity of its population, and its excessive mythologization whether utopian or dystopian. By following murals and muralists, the film espouses the geography and the diversity of a more intimate Los Angeles, journeying visually and spatially among its people, their representations and stories – a spatial reading most relevant in Los Angeles<sup>14</sup>.

Muralists and their works in Varda's film mark borders and territories visually and spatially. They also break them down, just as in Barca's Great Los Angeles Wall, and in the art form itself of the

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13 Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land*, 1946 (Salt Lake City : Peregrine Smith Books, 1973) 314.

14 See David James on the appropriateness of a spatial reading of Los Angeles literature, after French philosopher Henri Lefebvre and his idea that a society produces its own space, thus a city should be understood in spatial terms - a theory of social space that was applied in geography to Los Angeles by Edward Soja and the so-called Los Angeles School of Urbanism. See David James, "Los Angeles, Writing and Space", *Seeing Los Angeles: A Different Look at A Different City*, ed. Guy Bennett and Béatrice Mousli (Los Angeles: Otis Books/Seismicity Editions, 2007) 140-157. See also about the poetry scene's espousing of Los Angeles's geography Sophie Rachmuhl, *Los Angeles Speaks for Itself : Rise of a Poetry Scene 1950-1990* (Los Angeles: Otis Books/Seismicity Editions, forthcoming).

mural which has been seized upon by all communities and neighborhoods. Hearing the muralists speak about their work, explaining their creation, the story behind the mural, the art work becomes more complex, undoing stereotypes. A case in point is the story of Thomas Edison's representation on the Great Wall of Los Angeles, as told by Judy Baca:

In our research we found that Thomas Edison, one of the greatest American inventors, was born in Zacatecas, Mexico. And in fact his name was Tomás Alva Edison and he was born of Mexican parents. So we painted him with the Goddess of the Chichimecas, who's coming out of the pyramid and who's part corn, whispering secrets in his ears, inspiring him to invent the light bulb and the movie camera which changed the Los Angeles industry and was a very important development of Los Angeles. (MM, Barca)

Edison, who is usually associated with industrial capitalism and the US culture, industry and hegemony, instead becomes an emblem of mestisaje and fertility, and a bridge between ancient indigenous gods and L.A.'s current industrial landscape.

Likewise, by way of its title "*Mur Murs*", the film breaks down spatial barriers. It plays on the meaning of "mur" – wall in French – and murmur (whispering), and is an allusion to a line in a poem by Victor Hugo, the great 19<sup>th</sup> century French writer:

Le mur murant Paris rend Paris murmurant (the wall walling in Paris makes Paris murmur)

This refers to a wall which was built all around Paris before the Revolution to force people passing through to pay a tax. Victor Hugo's line embodied popular discontent about the wall. This wall was built close to Agnès Varda's home in Paris in the 14<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement, on rue Daguerre, the street she also made her first feature documentary about. Hence, thanks to its title, the film becomes "a bridge (between) the rue Daguerre, in the 14<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement of Paris, and the walls of Los Angeles, California" (Varda 145). Through Agnès Varda's personal references, a link is built between seemingly unrelated cities – Paris and Los Angeles, topics – rue Daguerre and Los Angeles murals, and people – Agnès Varda and the muralists of Los Angeles.

In fact, though Varda adopts the documentary genre, her tone remains highly personal as she writes her own narration in the editing room and she then narrates it herself. Her subjective, even intrusive voice, interpreting, discussing and sometimes judging images and people, in a playful way which can occasionally turn annoying, is a trademark of what she calls her "subjective documentaries", and a common thread running through them. This trait kept her film from having access to mainstream distribution in the United States: when she sought to sell *Mur Mur* to ABC and NBC, she was turned down because "they felt it was so French to have an opinion and to express it (oneself)" and they suggested she "have someone write a neutral, objective narration and then ask Gregory Peck to read it" (Varda 102).

The voice-over is a way for her to think aloud about "her relation to the world and creation" (Brioude, 2) and it is as much part of the film as the images and people filmed. As she says, "by filming murals, I filmexist" (Varda 147). This has allowed her to create "one of the most intimate works and at the same time the most universal" (Brioude, 2), as her narration constantly weaves relationships between the people's concerns on the screen and her personal concerns.

Thus the murals (as well as the film) engage the various spaces, people and planes in a dialogue, and act as mediators between the outside and inside worlds – a paradoxical role for a wall to play<sup>15</sup>. Agnès Varda wants to make those walls speak not as objects but as subjects. She is interested in making the inhabitants of Los Angeles – the muralists and viewers of the murals – and the inhabitants of the walls tell their stories.

"Bride and Groom", Kent Twitchell's famous giant mural covering the five floors of a bridal shop in Downtown L.A., illustrates the intermingling of different stories, voices and planes, which is constant in *Mur Murs*. The sequence on "Bride and Groom" begins with Carlos Ortiz, the owner of the store who commissioned the

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<sup>15</sup> On this paradox, see Jean-Michel Durafour who says, in a short essay about *Mur Murs*, that the mural is "a constitutive paradox, that of an obstacle that leads one to see." (p.8), for "words and colors (...) transform a wall which is an obstacle into a call to imagination and an invitation instead" (p.7 my translation). Jean-Michel Durafour, "*Murs, murs* (sic)", *Cités*2007/3, n°31, 7-8.



work, greeting us sitting in a tuxedo inside his shop, introducing himself in a serious, rather stiff way, explaining that "he wanted to have something spectacular to announce his business." (MM, Ortiz). Then we hear Agnès Varda's voice telling us it took Kent Twitchell five years to paint this romance, as the camera slowly pans up the building, unveiling the giant blue mural, while distant real-life model brides and grooms wave at us from the windows of the painted building. Varda adds her own ironic commentary, ever sensitive to the artist's plight: "But everything wasn't romantic. They wanted to make him pay for the parking of his scaffold. So he had to paint at night." Varda proceeds to tell us the story of the mural: the owner and his fiancée were the original models but as she left him at a time when only her head had been painted, "Carlos Ortiz was on the wall by himself for two years until we could find a bride for the body" explains muralist Kent Twitchell filmed at his home. The body he eventually found to fill in was his own fiancée's, now his wife, whom he now playfully stages for us in his home, having her pose again in bride gown and bouquet as in the original. The scene ends as it began with Carlos Ortiz, concluding: "Today I'm proud and I'm grateful to Kent for doing this beautiful work in the city of Los Angeles."

In this self-contained scene, voices and characters are staged and tell different stories: that of the owner, whose ceremoniousness contrasts with his unhappy love life; that of the harsh material condition of the artist, whose happy lover though has supplied the body for his art work; that of the mural and its making, which is shown through time (five years) with photographs of its various unfinished stages – photographs that are hard to distinguish from the current filmed mural; that of the finished mural at the time of the film, slowly panned over to reveal its aesthetics and grandeur, humorously staged by Varda with couples dressed in wedding clothes, at the windows or coming out of a fancy ribboned car in the parking lot in front; that of Agnès Varda, who is filming the mural, the muralist and the patron, and staging them (including the mural) to be telling their story in a certain way, adding her own voice and comments to theirs; that of the film where this scene is inserted among other scenes - some of which dealt with other Kent Twitchell murals – adding yet another tier to the film.

All these voices and points of view intermingle and tell different stories, each from a different angle, reflecting the complexity

of reality, belying appearances: romances are not what they seem nor muralists (here one would expect the artist of a Mexican-American theme in a Mexican-American shop and district to be Mexican-American for example.) Borders are blurred.

By way of her documentary, Varda questions representation in art – in painting and especially in film making – based on composition/staging and illusion. To Agnès Varda, “to direct is to lie” (Varda 259) and the real is always staged. In fact, the film is about the representation (Varda’s film) of representation (murals) and has multiple narrative levels going on at once: that of the murals, the people, the narration, the camera, the music and the editing, all of which do not necessarily tell the same story. This multiplicity of layers and voices is heightened by the structure of the film which progresses in spirals, Varda going back to certain murals or muralists, and showing them again in a different setting. One striking example is Willie Herrón’s lyrical mural of Adam and Eve dancing naked in the jungle. It first appears at the beginning of the film, only to music, after Varda has explained there are many special murals in Los Angeles. In the last third of *Mur Murs*, it is shown again, and commented on by Willie Herrón himself, responding to young onlookers’ inquiry as to why the couple has been left white while the rest is luxuriantly colorful. After Herrón answers it was actually unintentional as he had originally meant to dress them in wedding attire, the mural is again shown only to music to underline its lyrical and aesthetic qualities. Furthermore, this comes at a time when the film viewer has become familiar with Herrón, a major artist who is focused on throughout the film as both muralist and performance artist (he has a band we see and is a member of avant-garde Chicano performance group Asco we also see a performance of).

To further blur borders between illusion and reality, and between film and painting, movement, more than stillness, is associated with the murals, which the camera continually pans over, or in front of which a parked car suddenly drives off, or people walk. There are even portable murals we follow around the city.

Throughout *Mur Murs*, Varda plays at confusing the viewer between what is represented on the murals and the outside filmed reality. At the very beginning of the film, as the titles unfold on the panned graffitied wall, we first see on the wall a child, whom we take to be a painted character until we see him a little later cross

and leave the frame. Varda uses this device constantly in the film, as in the "Bride and Groom" mural described earlier, where it is difficult to distinguish the filmed version of the mural from the photographs of the unfinished versions of the mural, and where, in addition, Varda stages her own brides and grooms at the windows, adding her own touch to the mural.

The sequence about Farmer John's frolicking pig mural begins with Arno Jordan, the muralist, standing still for a few seconds beside his painted self-portrait, in the same position, before descending from his ladder and lifting the illusion. This scene will be another reason for the film not to be broadcast on US television, for misrepresenting reality and misleading the viewer. In fact, Varda constantly mingles the painted inhabitants on the walls, the inhabitants living amid the murals and the artists that have painted them, playing on a confusion of borders between the three kinds of inhabitants – painted characters, live Angelenos and artists – thanks to the illusory two-dimensionality of film.

The whole film relies on *trompe l'oeil*, a technique playing on visual illusion first associated with the Italian Renaissance<sup>16</sup>, and masterfully illustrated in *Mur Murs* by Terry Schoonhoven and Arthur Mortimer, whose mural "Brandelli's Brig", made for a bar owner, adds an extra layer of illusion when Varda has the people portrayed pose in front of the mural which, in the words of the artist is "a mural inside a mural inside a mural."

Varda wanted to film "the inhabitants of the walls" (MM, Varda) as well as the inhabitants of Los Angeles, making the walls speak. In the end, it seems indeed it is the murals that express themselves, "evolving their own themes" (MM, Terry Schoonhoven).

Far from enclosing or imprisoning, the walls in *Mur Murs* express the vitality of the city and its communities, and its various stories, as well as the power of art, illusion and life at expressing, confronting, and finally opening borders: those of Mexican-Americans', as well as the other communities'. They invite into a

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<sup>16</sup> This is represented in the film by a mural reproducing a famous Roman square in Venice, California, commissioned by a nostalgic Italian ice-cream shop owner to an Italian painter, also interviewed in the film about his work.

"multimodal" inner journey while being part of the outside lived environment and public space. And beyond the frames/borders of both murals and the film, Varda suggests, life continues.

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# The Border Region: A Fluid Network of Connections

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## Abstract

La cortina de la tortilla, expresión utilizada desde 1882 en Las Vegas para describir la separación administrativa de la ciudad entre dos grupos socio-económicos y políticos, será analizada y contrastada con la noción de un muro fronterizo. Las raíces históricas de la cortina de la tortilla se encuentran en el periódico de Santa Fe, *The New Mexican*. Este periódico acuñó la frase que desde entonces ha ilustrado las políticas contradictorias de los Estados Unidos en que el mexicano ha sido bienvenido cuando se necesita mano de obra barata pero ahuyentado cuando las situaciones sociales y económicas la han demandado. Se estudiará el concepto de la cortina de la tortilla desde la óptica histórica, económica y psicosocial con el fin de demostrar como simboliza la separación necesaria entre dos grupos culturales que aún se relacionan en vínculos de empatía, comunicación y la participación democrática. El concepto de un muro fronterizo, un esfuerzo demasiado humano de proteger, defender y resistir se analizará como un símbolo de la enemistad política, una forma de apartheid social, autoprotección y egoísmo colectivo. Tomando en cuenta la postura de Robert Frost, además, se explorará la ausencia de muros y la libre circulación como una visión de la utopía humana conducente a la entropía social y siempre un preámbulo al progreso humano.

The concept of the "tortilla curtain," expression used as of 1882 in Las Vegas to describe the loose administrative separation of the city into two socio-economic and cultural entities, will be analyzed and contrasted with the notion of a wall. Its historical roots are linked with The Santa Fe local newspaper, *The New Mexican*, which coined the phrase that has since become famous and useful to illustrate the time-serving policies of the US government which flipped the tortilla up when it needed labor and turned it into a stern, stiff wall when the economic or social situation demanded

an anti-immigration policy. It will be studied here from a historical, economic and psychosocial standpoint, with a view to demonstrating how it symbolized the necessary separation between two national cultural entities still functioning through empathy, communication and participative democracy, at a time of economic boom and social euphoria. The concept of a wall, an all too human pragmatic endeavor at protecting, defending, resisting, coercing, will be seen as a symbol and vector of potential enmity, a form of social apartheid, self-protection and collective egoism. Conversely, in keeping with Robert Frost's philosophical stance in his poem *Mending Wall*, the absence of walls and free circulation will also be seen as a form of generally accepted utopia possibly conducive to social entropy but always to be considered as a preliminary to human progress.

In today's world of clashes but also intermingling of cultures, economies and peoples, the physical border may be seen, in North America, as an outmoded concept of separation between groups, as it is not a physical line any more, but a hybrid zone, a fluctuating buffer area not so alien to the concept of the frontier<sup>17</sup>, in the sense that it moves forward here, or recedes there, encompassing a wide, ever-expanding territory. For along the so-called Mexican "border", for lack of an adequate word, can be seen, in a real world

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<sup>17</sup> Originally a paper read at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, July 12, 1893. It first appeared in the Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, December 14, 1893, and later in the *Report of the American Historical Association for 1893*, 199-227, "American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area" or further on "The most significant thing about the American frontier is, that it lies at the hither edge of free land. In the census reports it is treated as the margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile. The term is an elastic one, and for our purposes does not need sharp definition. We shall consider the whole frontier belt including the Indian country and the outer margin of the "settled area" of the census reports. Thomas Torrens, in the foreword of *Forging the Tortilla Curtain, Cultural Drift and Change Along the United States - Mexico Border from the Spanish Conquest to the Present*, refers to the frontier as "a work in progress". One may also read Francisco A Lomel's article "The Border as a Moving Tortilla Curtain: Media and Chicano Literary Representation." In *The Open World: Multicultural Discourse and Intercultural Communications*, ed Tatiana V. Voronchenko, Chita, Siberia: The Zabaikalsky State University Press, 2007. 181-7.

yet reminiscent of fictitious cinematic representations such as *Blade Runner* for example (Ridley Scott, 1983), declined in many shades, tones and accents, the heirs of the specific and complex Mexican mestizaje analysed by Chicana theoretician Gloria Anzaldúa in *La Frontera, The New Mestiza*<sup>18</sup>.

In their opus also entitled *La Frontera* (1986)- another seminal description and analysis of enmeshed cultures and landscapes of the Mexico-United States borderlands -, sociologist Alan Weisman and photographer Jay Dusard evoke times primeval, when passes through the sierras, ranges and cañons were not mere physical paths through the wilderness, but affective bonds, lifelines to the original inhabitants, quite outside the concept of limit, margin or demarcation that would come later, in the wake of imperialistic predatory moves. With a view to demonstrating it, they allude to the institutionalized separation between the United States and Mexico, before the tearing down of the Berlin Wall:

Mexico is still there, meshing metropolises with the United States. Nowhere else but Berlin are so many souls skewered by a line drawn on a map<sup>19</sup>.

The comparison they made at that time, between on the one hand the Berlin Wall, a mere relic today of totalitarian days and of a post Cold War partitioning of Europe, and on the other hand that of a persistent North-South line of demarcation in North America, certainly evokes the possibility of a utopian world where free circulation is available to all humans, as opposed to the aforementioned political severance.

Alan Weisman observes, with a wistful eye, the number of twin cities such as Ciudad Juarez/El Paso, Piedras Negras/Eagle Pass, as they sprawl across the demarcation, despite the pragmatic line on the ground. If he broaches upon the common sense of belonging and sharing, he nevertheless underlines, in most cities, a third worldly

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18. Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987, 5: "A borderline is a vague and undetermined place, created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition."

19 Weisman Alan and Jay Dusard. *La frontera*. San Diego : Harcourt Brace Janovitch, 1986, 84.



theory of urban real estate, with a sociological line dividing most border cities, the least affluent usually living to the South East. The authors of *La Frontera* particularly refer to the past Carter administration, when an expanded metal Tortilla Curtain was erected along the US side of the river, to keep the Mexican citizens out. They note that within a week, most of the fencing had been transformed into chicken pens in Juarez backyards, a way of flaunting government decisions and Washington ratiocinations.

A visionary Weisman was already, in 1986, advocating a white paper discussed at the time in Congress, asking for the establishment of a two hundred mile wide free zone that would have included Phoenix, Los Angeles, San Antonio and Monterey in one two-thousand-mile Hong Kong. An achievement that could never be accepted by either country, on both sides of the symbolic but militarily enforced linear border, contrary to the previously mentioned ideological concept of the turnerian, pliable frontier of old.

### **Where border meant borderlands: from the Las Vegas tortilla curtain back to the Assyrian borderlands**

The term "tortilla curtain," a well-known hybrid phrase today, has slowly lost, over the long historical period of anglicization of present day Nevada and New Mexico, the original cultural meaning that was prevalent in the year 1882 in Las Vegas to describe the loose administrative separation of the city into two socio-economic and cultural entities. Its historical roots are linked with The Santa Fe local newspaper, *The New Mexican*, which coined the phrase that has since lost the fraternal ring it used to have, to illustrate the time-serving policies of the US government which flipped the tortilla up when it needed labor and turned it into a stern, stiff wall when the economic or social situation demanded an anti-immigration policy. The former Las Vegas social organization implied the existence of constant exchanges in a bicultural environment, considered as a man's land akin to the bilateral periphery of two distant cultural groups. The common margins of two cultural entities that actually remind one of the shared territory or space of the first communities of Assyria and Babylon described by French anthropologist and historian Jean Marie Durand<sup>20</sup>.

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20 Semantic study conducted by Jean Marie Durand, as stated in his Inaugural lesson at the Collège de France in the year 2000.

He refers to two different communities, alien to each other, which had emerged and developed in ancient times, on both extremities of the later called Arabian Desert. The first word associated with the concept of border appears to have been that of the Semitic language "quase, quasum," meaning 'far from the center,' or by extension 'limit, periphery'. It was the area where the desert ended, where water surged, and herds of cattle ventured to graze. Solidarity was linked with survival, for both communities contractually shared the grazing area. Another word, "nawa" - in Assyrian, "nawot" in Hebrew -, meant emigrate, or literally 'transporting oneself to another place to become fat'. The word also conveyed the idea of the 'fattening of a camel'. The ancient etymology of "emigration" emerges here through this simile as the custom of leaving one's country in order to find another one where pastures are greener.

Our aim in venturing into the ancient communities of Assyria and Semitic languages is only meant here to underline the anthropological roots of human solidarity in traditional pastoral cultures, the necessary sharing of natural resources in order for communities to survive, bilaterally, before strong national entities were invented, before supranational, hegemonic philosophies involved the never-ending race for the accumulation of wealth. The territory was exploited seasonally, by both tribes, on that virtual part of the kingdoms, as the word « disum », or grass, was tantamount to the survival of pastoral economies. Following our rationale, we could say that this ancient pastoral model can be said to relate to ancient modes of relations between Northern and Southern communities present on the Rio Grande area before the diverse successive colonizations by the French, Spanish, Mexican, and Euro American predators. Diverse, multiple languages and mores had aggregated or coalesced on each side, held together by the two dominant ethnic groups, Spanish-Mexican on one side, therefore partly Indian, and Anglo-Saxon on the other, therefore Euro American and diverse as well, with an original Indian population generally often slighted and devoid of an independent status as a group.

Santa Barbara historiographer of the Spanish presence in

the Southwest, Francisco A Lomelí recently gave one example of misunderstanding, that can be seen as a linguistic borrowing leading to cooperation, with one of the least known of the semantic creations operated by the Anglo settlers, that of "dollywalter". As many Texans already know, it refers to:

The cowboy on horseback who chases a calf, ropes it-if he can manage it-, jumps off his horse, pulls out a leather strap from his back pocket somewhere, and twirls that strap around the calf's legs to claim it tamed. People in Spanish, in this ritual, yelled "Dale vuelta, dale vuelta". Of course English speakers didn't quite hear that, so they thought "dollywalter" was being said, and soon integrated the word<sup>21</sup>.

For the two federating and interpenetrating languages were in constant contact, trade, partnership, as part of reciprocal exchanges, and therefore bore the symptom of potential osmosis. Both sides communicated easily, when they felt the need, as long as no door, gate, fence, fortification, barbed wire, or the ultimate version of utter separation, the utter wall, barred access to the other side. This implicit possibility of circulation had a quasi-jurisprudential value, validated by long practice over decades, as when firemen from the Mexican twin city of Acuña helped their alien partners of Del Rio, USA, to repair the sewers or cope with a flashflood<sup>22</sup>, under the premise of a peaceful status quo, even though the tenuous, flimsy demarcation was already signaling an economic imbalance, made manifest through the existence - also implicit -, of a sociological frontier.

For the visible but paternalistic demarcation between an Hispanic and Anglo urbanized area implied the soft relegation of the once sole occupant who only benefited from the natural law of anteriority on the territory, according to a common law principle that was soon to be thwarted in the wake of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, when a national identity decreed by law would

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21 Francisco A Lomelí, "Border literature/ la littérature de la frontière", Colloquium *Multiculturalism and plurilingualism*, Bordeaux University, Dec 14<sup>th</sup> 2008.

22 La Frontera, 52, as quoted by Alan Weisman, describing the interaction between the mayors of Acuña and del Rio.

contradict the long established informal balance and sharing. With the ossification of Mexican American relations after the treaty, the « tortilla curtain » had come to infer the existence, between the two former populations in contact, of a socioeconomic separation of a more symbolic than physical importance, a demarcation between two economic environments which have slowly drifted apart because of growing disparities and political decisions leading to an economic apartheid.

The "curtain" nomenclature at stake here therefore serves today as a popular euphemism, widely used as a symbolic reminder of a never-ending class distinction between haves and have nots, North and South of both sides of the 2000 thousand mile border. The presence of a real wall considered to be impassable in some places may be said to be equally symbolic, as it remains today, as the symptom of an obsolescent divide which betrays a desire of exclusion at a time of free international circulation and a generalized solidarity diffused towards all the peoples in need, be it only in the interest of the givers. One might also suggest that the former "tortilla curtain," with the constant adjunction of traits of a Latino culture to the national culture of the United States, flutters today, over the majority of the territory, despite the presence of a man-built rampart reminiscent of Gulliver's predicament<sup>23</sup>.

*In the light of etymology: differences between the concepts of curtain and wall*

A brief incursion into etymology may serve here to highlight resemblances, associations, connotations, filiations and differences. "Curtain," or "cortina," a feminine word, closer therefore, we might venture to say, to the world of affects, comes from a homely feudal term, the "cortine," or bed curtain, a Latin word related to the microcosm of private life, but often referring to a defensive mood, that of the "cortine," also in military semantics defining the fortified stronghold, or place where one retreated to protect the group from predators and warlike assailants, at a time of exposure to perils by feudal landowners, in times of a historic lack of law and

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23 In Jonathan Swift's classic satirical novel, explorer Gulliver may appear as a giant to the eyes of the smaller people whom he encounters. Nevertheless, by dint of their numbers and collective efforts, they manage to turn him into a prisoner.

order. On a more psychological point of view, the term meant 'vapor', 'smoke', 'blurring', a means of hiding oneself as for self-protection from outsiders, with no aggressiveness, through a strategy of survival by concealment.

The curtain therefore can be said to minimize the level of separation between two different entities or groups, meant to guarantee separate organisms' survival and development, without excluding communication and exchanges, with the minimum demarcation as may be necessary to justify two separate biological, independent entities. It exemplifies the difference between living close but severed from the twin other, rather than living dissociated from the alien other.

We may venture to say that the concept of the porous membrane therefore excludes the solid partition prevalent with the semantic meaning of the wall, a word derived from the Latin vallum, itself derived from a Saxon military word, "wall, rampart, row or line of stakes," "defensive fortification, interior partition," which acknowledges the utter refusal of a right of passage or a refusal to share a common space. As a human construction, the wall can be considered as a necessary tool which translates the paranoia attached to most civilizing endeavors, involves a means of ultimate self-protection, affirms an exclusivist vision of one's future. It has realistically been validated as a military, self-defensive tool, but is ultimately conducive to social isolation.

The historical origin of the simple name "Wall Street" testifies to the self-protective drive of the settlers coming from Europe. For we may notice that the founding of New York, its protection against native occupants' penetration into the circle of the happy few, is actually linked to the "Wall Street" denomination, an artery created in 1836, and home today to many investment firms and stock traders, but so called because it ran along the interior of the defensive wall of the old Dutch colonial town. It therefore implies a blank, solid rejection, and collective selfish reactions organized around the concept of the clan of privileged citizens, implying the coercive attitudes of a civilizing, managerial process that goes against the unhampered freedom of the natural world. We are reminded of historic walls that have separated two countries, edifices that will always be remembered as the symptoms of a fear of invasion or xenophobic and isolationist moods.

## Robert Frost' wisdom: "something there is that doesn't love a wall"

We know that when President John F. Kennedy inspected the Berlin Wall, he quoted Robert Frost's famous 1915 poem, *Mending Wall*, particularly its first line, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall"<sup>24</sup>, an Apollonian statement of a philosophical, dreamy quality, pervaded by a broad-minded liberal internationalism. We may note the discursive indirection, or even non-committal tone through "something there is." The poet means that walls can be good as well as bad, that there are two sides to them, a positive one and a negative one as well, which vindicates the two points of views.

The poem can be read as a political and social allegory. It has an ambiguous ring as it acknowledges the limitations and negative connotations of walls, but also stresses their usefulness as protective, even though prosaic elements of culture as opposed to the unhampered seductiveness of nature. To prove his point with his usual subtlety, Frost combines the indefinite pronoun "something" with the loose expletive construction "there is" to evoke a ruminative vagueness, and a reluctant acceptance of an unpleasant reality. For the poem doesn't begin with "I hate walls," or even, "Something dislikes a wall." The indirection, the riddle-like formulation, or ironic evasiveness may be meant to assess the unconscious dislike of walls but the recognition that they are, at a concrete level, indispensable to the protection of social order and the permanence of culture over unruly nature. He therefore assesses the supremacy of the reality principle over a pleasure principle that would abolish walls. If walls make humans stronger, reinforcing the sense of the collective, and of the mastery of man over the natural world, walls also strengthen individual men, protecting property rights and social order, sometimes functioning as a bulwark against the wilderness. Insiders therefore ensure that a clear distinction is established between the members of the group or the clan who should be the chosen beneficiaries of opulence.

Contrary to this reality principle, advocating the elimination of walls

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24 Poem "Mending Wall" by Robert Frost, in *Selected Poetry*, New York, Bartelby, 1999, 64. First edition New York, Henry Holt, 1915.

certainly works towards an emancipatory universalism, as walls can also be seen as the antithesis of universal social justice and necessary redistribution. Moreover, well beyond their useful social function, walls cannot be separated from the stubborn, down-to-earth, unpoetic symbolism of "Good fences make good neighbors". If a humanistic stand here implies the acknowledgement of their necessity as a tool towards a hierarchic social order, the protection of groups and resources, in order to prevent chaos, we conversely must cling to our utopias, our universalistic dreams. A whiff of idealism must remain with us, and men must know how to break their defenses, or simply more prosaically, the physical barriers they have erected out of fear or egoism.

In fact, owning himself to the apparent contradiction, conscious of the aporic nature of his disquisition, when the poem supports one thing and its contrary, Robert Frost himself very philosophically said: "Maybe I was both fellows in the poem." "I've got a man there; he's both of those people, he's a wall builder and a wall toppler. He makes boundaries and he breaks boundaries. That's man".

### **Reflecting upon the interlingual phrase: "tortilla curtain"**

The adjunction of the Mexican culinary word, "tortilla", a marker of a high-context culture which privileges affects, to the English "curtain", a term associated with self-protection or isolation, creates an interlingual phrase that one can subject to ideological interpretations. "Tortilla" may be a Spanish word, but it still brings forth memories of an Aztec past, as well as the reference to the basic staple and means of survival of Mesoamericans. The fact that the curtain be symbolically made of tortilla acknowledges its overall Mexican flavor; even if it smacks of Spanish colonialism, in as much as the Aztec term "tlaxcalli," appropriated by the conquistadores, was integrated into the Spanish language, to be turned into "tortilla," a more hispanized term, therefore easier to pronounce for the colonizers.

Paternalism, another characteristic of the smooth strategies of persuasive acculturation, is not absent from the appellation, as the "tortilla curtain," and not the "cortina de tortilla," originated the concept that was designed to isolate the exclusivist Anglo-

American community from another alien community, considered to be poorer, and characterized by an Indian ethnic background. The term "tortilla" was implicitly referring to the allegedly simple life of the pastoral and rural neighbors, therefore becoming a simplifying synecdoche not devoid of a touch of paternalism on the part of the Anglophone population. For even though the territories had been pioneered by the once powerful Spaniards, the soon domineering or even admired Anglo-American settlers who were slowly outnumbering the Hispanophone inhabitants of the Las Vegas region were naming things, a way of symbolic appropriation that they brought with their assertive colonizing mores.

The dual phrase coined in the 1880ies by the binational community of Las Vegas associated a term of potential rejection in English, with an affective term in Spanish, to produce one of the first meaningful code-switchings that would later become the main linguistic strategy of Chicano interlingual poetry<sup>25</sup>.

For the "tortilla" symbol of survival for the ancient founding fathers of Mexico, an affective term that was revered in the Mexican barrio, had come to symbolize the strong adhesion to cultural roots that value affective bonds, family life, collective behavior and solidarity. On the other side, strong individualism and personal achievement were to prevail in a highly competitive environment alien to the ascriptive Mexican model. Two communities would soon be separated by a widening socioeconomic gap. The poor and dominated would have to flip the curtain over in order to force a passage when the symbolic tortilla was getting scarce in Mexico. The poor would also be enticed to slither their way through the flimsy curtain when the Anglophone community needed them as laborers. One may therefore assume that the hybrid linguistic construct which associates the Mexican identity marker, "tortilla," with the English harsher word "curtain," gives the edge, semantically, so to say, to the Anglo-American side which orchestrates the separation. For the pliable curtain can be raised unilaterally, for economic reasons, when the host country need cheap labor. Conversely, it can be flapped down authoritatively, when the dominant country is not in need of labor any more, in times of recession or political crises.

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25 For a pioneering work, see Alurista, et al. *Literatura fronteriza: antología del Primer Festival San Diego-Tijuana, Mayo 1981*, San Diego, Maize Press, 1982.



One side is therefore stronger than the other and the motion in the other direction of the pendulum is blocked. The former loose concertina door has become a gate at best, at its worst a wall or even a fence. A gate, because it opens on command, a fence because it rounds people in or out of a privileged circle, a wall, as it repels climbers, assailants and alleged predators, through an orgy of technical apparatus scattered amidst vast, uniform, larger than human landscapes. As a vibrant symbol of successful interculturalism, the historic tortilla curtain may well flutter today over the whole of the United States, only to be contradicted along the militarized demarcation, by political contradiction. For it appears that a schismatic or even schizophrenic division of affects is relentlessly being orchestrated, in the face of the blatant intermingling of cultures, between two antagonistic moods, between what chicano novelist Rolando Romero perceives as "the border of fear" from a certain United States perspective, and "the border of desire" from the Mexican side<sup>26</sup>.

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26 See Rolando Romero, "Border of Fear, Border of Desire", *Borderlines*, I, I, 1993, 36-70.

# Long Memories, Short Fuses: The Minuteman Project and the Texas Rangers

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## Introduction

The Minuteman Project first burst upon the national scene in April 2005 with its project to patrol 23 miles of the international border in Arizona. Fed up with what they perceived as the failure of the federal government and Border Patrol to enforce immigration law, members of the private, citizen-based organization took it upon itself to assist these groups in the task. Armed with strong rhetoric and promises to stop the "invasion of America" by illegal aliens from Mexico and other southern nations, the Minutemen indeed went down to the border, and their efforts to inform the Border Patrol of illegal activities resulted in scores of detentions and almost two dozen arrests (Coronado AI).

The appearance of a vigilante-style, grass-roots citizen endeavor immediately caught the attention of media and political activists of all stripes. The controversy surrounding this tough-talking group was instantaneous; some, mainly conservatives and libertarians, lauded their attempt to force the feds into facing a very problematic situation. Others, including liberals and civil rights outfits, were vociferous in denunciations of what they saw as a ploy by racist and nativist reactionaries to take the law into their own hands and discriminate against Mexicans and other Hispanic immigrants.

As the summer dragged on, the popularity of the Minutemen increased, as did media coverage of the organization. Organizers held public meetings in Goliad, Texas, in July to discuss implementation of a program in the Lone Star State to patrol borders along the Rio.

Grande by October 2005. For a state with the second-most Hispanics in America, and one with a long history of racial and ethnic antagonism, the arrival of the Minutemen phenomenon

was sure to create turmoil, and quickly did. Rights groups such as the ACLU, LULAC, and La Raza mobilized against the Minutemen and vowed to keep them out by whatever means, while collectives of citizens welcomed the monitor group to town, voicing many of the same complaints about porous borders and weak or intermittent law enforcement as had many people out west.

Texas, having won its independence from Mexico after the bloody revolution of 1836, and having gained statehood in 1845 and igniting the Mexican War of 1846-48 in the process, became a battleground once again. This war has been fought so far with rhetoric and symbolism, mainly through the media. Strong, emotional collective memories of the parties in question have made the Minutemen and the immigration quandary the hottest issues of the summer, outside of the war in Iraq. Now coming to the surface is the residue of over 150 years of conflict between Anglos and Mexicans/Mexican-Americans in Texas, a simmering tension that has at times been latent, subdued and subconscious but at others manifest and pronounced.

When anti-Minutemen groups use the media to protest against the project to patrol the border with citizen groups, and when pro-Minutemen parties employ similar channels to trumpet the possibility of controlling illegal entry to the United States, they are often using underlying philosophies buoyed by constructed schemas, or lenses through which to view present events, which have been generations in the making. For in fact, to anti-Minutemen forces the controversial principals represent a specter of oppression and discrimination they correlate directly with the Texas Rangers. *Los rinches*, as the Rangers have been derisively called throughout their 183-year history, are/were seen by many Hispanics in Texas as an illegal marauding force that visited violent depredations on the communities in the Rio Grande Valley and Northern Mexico. To pro-Minutemen forces, the Minutemen exploits are seen as a continuation of what the Rangers were able to accomplish on the frontier: an end to cattle-stealing by Mexicans and depredations by the region's wild Indians, by a bold citizen soldiery that was able to do what the federal government could not: protect the border.

The purpose of this article is to trace the histories of the Minutemen and the Texas Rangers, paying close attention to the collective mindset on both sides of the controversies both groups

have engendered, and to affect a comparison of the groups. Their situations are actually quite similar in many respects, but also diverge in a few key places. But what is consistent in each case is the presence of deeply ingrained stereotypes and collective schemas on the part of both Anglos and Mexicans in Texas. The recent decision of the Minutemen to build on their success out west and travel to Texas has brought long-submerged tensions to the fore once again, as history not only threatens to repeat itself, but is well along the curve toward doing just that.

The article will begin with a brief synopsis of the immigration situation, especially its political relevance to the presidential election of 2008. It will examine historical efforts to solve the immigration problem, and then move on to a section describing the growth of the Minuteman Project. Then it will focus on the Texas Rangers, offering a sketch of the organization's rise both in practice and in various modes of representation, and the reaction of the local population on the Texas border to that ascendance. The final purpose of the article will center on comparing and contrasting the two historical movements in terms of their goals, methods, and the rhetoric employed on both sides of the divide. It will also discuss ways that collective memories have been constructed and reified through time.

The thesis employed is that when Texans react to the Minutemen, they are actually doing so in many instances with long memories of the Texas Rangers acting as automatic schemas, or mental organizing principles. What this means is that a difficult issue like immigration is made even more complicated to rationally comprehend because of the immense baggage brought to a consideration of the issue.

### **What's at Stake**

The immigration problem has been a conundrum for some time, a situation fraught with nuance and ambiguity. The tendency to frame it in polar, political terms must be resisted, for a healthy percentage of U.S. citizens have not made up their minds how they feel about it. The shorthand score sheet matches cheap labor versus the letter of the law for starters; the battle for resources is also a standard of assessment, as immigrants gave birth to 25 percent of the babies in the country in 2004, and 42 percent of those births

were to illegals (Moscoso 1B).

Adding to the confusion is the fact that the border has been a hotbed of violence in 2005, as the drug cartel war has heated up, resulting in hundreds of deaths in Northern Mexico and a larger than normal amount of trouble on the Texas side. Tourism has suffered and there are worries in Washington that national security could also be in danger (Geller 1A).

In times of trouble on the border, the federal government has responded in various ways, both through reasonable policy and quasi-nativist movements. The Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s was such an extremist, anti-foreigner political party, aimed against the copious influx of Irish refugees from the Potato Famine. Its movement also had distinct anti-Catholic trappings. In 1924 the U.S. Border Patrol was formed at the same time the Johnson Act severely limited immigration, as generations of immigrants from Eastern Europe found their path to the Promised Land blocked by legislation.

In modern times, various western state initiatives, such as California's controversial Proposition 187 in 1994 – an exclusionary tactic which was overwhelmingly passed by voter referendum but overturned in the courts – have attempted to either stem the flow of migration or limit the amount of services and resources immigrants could receive.

But on the border, especially in Texas, the situation has been more complicated than simply taking a side for or against free immigration. The Rio Grande Valley has long been an agricultural area with mainly Hispanic population, and as a Hispanic, Democratic stronghold has always tended to be sympathetic to the plight of migrants from poverty-ridden Mexico. There is a symbiosis between residents of the area and immigrants both legal and illegal, one that the rest of the country is starting to understand. As the Hispanic immigrant population grows steadily in other areas, people are starting to figure out that the newcomers are willing to do low-paying labor jobs such as yard work, dishwashing, construction, and maid service, that Americans are increasingly less interested in doing. Mexican president Vicente Fox's recent remarks to that effect were met with disdain by ethnic activists in the States. But it could be argued that there is some truth to what he said (Martin 1A).

Now there are new programs being devised to try and manage immigration, as legislators realize that despite the problematic notion of illegal immigration, the newcomers offer a source of labor that comes in quite handy.

The latest proposed Senate reform bill calls for \$5 billion, to hire new Border Patrol agents and get them more equipment. It also toys with the idea of naturalization, or amnesty, a concept the anti-immigration crowd finds abhorrent. A duplication of the Bracero Program of the 1940s and 1950s has also been discussed, as politicians try to solve the problem and avoid losing constituent support.

The wild card this year has been the well-publicized violence on the border, which threatens to short-circuit rational solutions to the issue. Historically speaking, times of violence have usually caused such Draconian thinking, and also enabled vigilante groups to surface. It is to a consideration of the most recent citizen-based policing effort that we now turn.

### **Grass-roots Activism, New Millenium-Style**

Organizer Chris Simcox of Arizona calls the Civil Defense Corps project the most important peaceful social movement since the Civil Rights era of the 1960s. He and his supporters decry the human flood of illegals that has "breached the country's defense" in recent decades, and have set out to turn the tide the other way (The Minuteman Project I).

The Corps works in tandem with the Minuteman Project, run by Jim Gilchrist, whose group is a grass-roots effort based on the original minutemen concept of the American 1770s. While the Corps' main concern is physically policing the border and informing Border Patrol agents whenever their patrols sight illegals, the Minuteman Project is focused on recruiting skilled professionals to fight against exploitation of cheap labor by employees, the use of smuggling and safe-house operations, and fraud in registration cards and other documents; attorneys, law enforcement veterans, police and fire employees, and others have joined the movement in the past year (The Minuteman Project I).

Both groups say they are fed up with the federal government's

failure to do anything about the problem of illegal immigration, and have employed strong rhetoric in both a denunciation of the government, and criticism of what they see as the inundation of America by undocumented migrants. The groups patrolled the Arizona border in April 2005 and are planning similar action in Texas by October 2005; together they comprise over 1,000 concerned citizens and the numbers continue to rise weekly. Their message is at once militant and controlled, bandying about quotes from Martin Luther King and American revolutionary patriot Samuel Adams, among others, to use familiar populist symbolism to further their cause.

“We are not biased against another country, we just want the government to own up to its job of protecting the border,” said Simcox on the Minutemen Web site. “We support the Border Patrol but challenge the government to fulfill its Constitutionally mandated responsibility (The Minuteman Project 2).

Gilchrist too feels that the country has become lax and is slowly being destroyed by mass migration from the south, a phenomenon he calls a “menace, devouring and plundering...it will overrun us in less than 20 years (The Minuteman Project 2).

He adds that the project is not a chartered organization, and not a militia or vigilante group. It is a “state of mind,” as Americans with mutual concerns have gotten together to act because government has not. Simcox stresses that the group will act within the law and social contract, and that restraint is imperative. Despite the fact that many of the organization’s members carry guns and use military-style rhetoric, both leaders insist that their job is to help enforcement become a reality, not to intimidate or hurt anyone (Gazzar A1).

Gilchrist’s arm of the movement also targets politicians who receive campaign contributions from pro-immigration groups, and has constructed a strong Internet presence to raise money for their goals and to spread negative publicity about groups and politicians whom they see as part of the problem and not the solution.

“We want to educate people and give them a chance to give us feedback through e-mail, and get involved as volunteers,” said Gilchrist, whose slick Web site sells management software that

volunteers can use to organize their local groups (The Minuteman Project 3).

The media have become a battleground for the Minutemen, as they battle against what Gilchrist calls "predicable charges of racism." The organizers in both groups seek to get their message of non-violent activism out to as many people as possible and one thing cannot be denied: the movement is extremely technology-savvy and has used the mass media to foment unrest and advance its cause.

Having such a pervasive, real-time forum to raise the issue of immigration and enforcement has been a boon and bane for the movement, as a strong contingent of supporters has been raised, as well as an equally determined cast of antagonists.

### **Voices Raised in Defiance**

One of the most vehement critics of the Minutemen effort has been Hector Carreon, of the self-styled radical Chicano outfit, *la Voz de Atlan*. He calls the Minutemen a gang of anti-Mexican racists who have ties to white supremacists groups (Lewis A1, 24 June 2005).

Art Diaz, a South Texas civil rights activist, agrees, saying that their anti-migrant activities are a brazen call to arms against the government that invite comparisons to the Nazis (WOAI News web 1).

LULAC representative Rosa Rosales has called for a resolution condemning the Minutemen, a group with "no respect for the law." She also has stated that the group uses racial profiling because they have shown no interest in or alarm about the country's northern border with Canada (Chasnoff and Anderson 5B).

"This group is a problem for American justice, and our system," said Jaime Martinez of the Contra Minutemen Coalition, formed in Corpus Christi in the summer of 2005 in direct response to several Minutemen meetings held in nearby Goliad (WOAI News web 2).

Political groups are up in arms against the prospect of



"vigilante" groups coming to Texas to patrol the border. Academics have also gotten into the fray, namely Armando Navarro, a University of California-Santa Barbara veteran of the civil rights days of the 1960s, who insists that immigration is an issue that must be resolved in the halls of Congress, not on the street. He and Che Lopez, of the Southwest Union Workers in San Antonio have called the Minutemen effort a "public lynching of innocent migrant workers" (Lewis A1, 21 June 2005).

Texas politician Sheila Jackson Lee, an African American, has made common cause with Hispanic activists and citizens against the plan, admitting that the publicity surrounding the Minutemen has been an appropriate wakeup call on the issue, but that the potential for violence the group denies is a very real component of the situation (McNary and Richard A1). For this reason, she has been among the scores of public officials, including South Texas politician Silvestre Reyes, to call for the disbanding of the movement.

Perhaps the most historically compelling argument has come from private citizens involved in the counter demonstration against Gilchrist and Simcox. Diaz of San Antonio echoed the opinion of many Hispanics in Texas when he told the San Antonio-Express News that "history has been written by the victors," referring to the longstanding complaint among Hispanics that Texas and the United States rode the wave of Manifest Destiny to take control of thousands of miles of territory that rightfully belonged to Mexicans before the wars of the 1830s and 1840s.

"The border crossed us, we didn't cross the border," Diaz explained, employing the line of reasoning popular with activists, Mexican historians, and American outfits such as the Chicanos during the tectonic 1960s awakening of ethnic consciousness (Zarazua 1B).

And a newspaper letter to the editor appearing in The Monitor of McAllen, Texas, in June 2005 summed it up well enough for the rank and file opposed to the Minutemen take on immigration and enforcement.

"The Minutemen are nothing but the KKK in disguise," wrote Elizabeth Cardoza of Mission (Cardoza 12B).

While the imagery of the KKK has been invoked on more than one occasion in this developing controversy, a more apt comparison from the geographical standpoint of South Texas would definitely involve the Texas Rangers, a storied outfit that has evoked a gamut of passionate emotions in the area since its inception as a citizen-defense organization in the 1830s.

### **Brief History of a Controversial Contingent**

The Texas Rangers, as part of the Department of Public Safety, are today limited to crime investigations and occasional peacekeeping missions. But the nation's oldest law enforcement agency with statewide jurisdiction lives on in popular culture and myth, and its 183-year history has been chronicled endlessly. The phrase may be more familiar these days to baseball fans of an eponymous American League team, but even after the Rangers became part of the DPS in the 1930s, their name was always enough to start a war of words, at least.

The early Rangers formed as a citizen defense group in the 1830s, when settlers in Texas found themselves constantly harassed by native Indians who felt the settlers were trespassers on their land. Walter Prescott Webb, in his imperial biography of the organization, notes that the Rangers followed the example of their American forefathers in creating committees of correspondence and safety to guard the frontier against Indian attack (Webb 22). Citing an inability of the federal government of the United States to keep things in hand, the citizens of Texas allowed their toughest inhabitants to mount up and take to the task of defense. Both Webb and T.R. Fehrenbach (in "Lone Star," a state history) note that this was a recurring theme: locals responding to local challenges because the distant government could not do the job (Fehrenbach 276).

By the 1880s, the Indians were banished from Texas and American settlement all the way to the Pacific Ocean caused the efficacy of the idea of a frontier, according to Frederick Jackson Turner, to come to an end (Turner 1). The Rangers, always an unofficial and intermittent force, turned their attention to the apprehension of bandits, both Anglo and Hispanic, in the region, capturing the notorious outlaw Sam Bass in 1878 and working against cattle-stealing and the conflicts of the Range War during the span leading to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Along the way they gained a reputation for ruthlessness that inspired fear on the part of outlaws, but also large elements of Texas including most Spanish speakers. Webb notes that Texans of the period operated with a distinct warlike psychology, after dealing with hostile Indians, a Civil War, and the degrading Reconstruction Era in the state (Webb 127/319). Such bitter experiences caused some of the Rangers to overstep their bounds as peacekeepers, and the occasional atrocity visited upon innocents enhanced the reputation of a Ranger as a no-nonsense, often violent individual: someone to be feared and avoided.

Fehrenbach suggests that in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Texas, there was a battle pitting Anglos against Mexicans and Tejanos, one in which relative strength was the telling factor against weakness. He adds that a certain degree of lawlessness is in the nature of life on the frontier, far from sophisticated cities and controlling governments (Fehrenbach 571; Webb 319). The Rio Grande Valley was such a place at this time.

The Rangers put down a revolution attempt by the colorful Juan Cortina in the late 1850s, battled against Mexicans/Tejanos at Las Cuevas in 1875, and put an end to the El Paso Salt War during the same period. At each turn, the avenging horsemen rode into action after local police could not manage the situation, and several sources note that Rangers had little compunction against shooting to kill. Intermittent bad behavior, writes Ben Proctor in "Just One Riot," overshadowed the good that the group was able to accomplish (Proctor 4; Webb 452). Public sentiment was indeed divided from the beginning, as some area residents praised Ranger efforts to keep the peace while others decried their use of extreme tactics to do so. Seen as patriots by some and bandits by others, the Rangers established a reputation for toughness that kept them in controversy.

The period 1912-20 was one of constant strife in the Valley, as the Mexican Revolution, World War I and the beginning of Prohibition kept the group busy patrolling the border and fighting against revolutionary Mexican incursions as well as smugglers and bandits, including Pancho Villa and the perpetrators of the ill-fated Plan de San Diego invasion of 1915.

Several historians point out that with the droves of honest

migrant laborers heading north to find work in the United States at the time, came handfulls of bad seeds looking to profit from illegal activities (Webb 463). Longstanding racial antagonism and bitterness borne of the Texan conquest of previously Mexican land came to the fore during the teens. Ranger activity during that decade led to the deaths of over 500 people, many of them innocent (Gonzalez 2005). Despite a major overhaul of the organization after the Canales Report of 1919 indicted them for dozens of atrocities – one of a series of adjustments the Rangers had made following periods of particularly questionable comportment – the die was cast in the minds of many Tejanos: the Rangers - or *el fantasma del norte*, as they were called at times - were bad news.

Proctor writes that the group's dismal record of murder and injustice in the Valley during the teens cannot be ignored, and that reputation lingered in the minds of the locals (Proctor 5). In the Valley, a small number of Anglos basically ran the show and the majority Hispanic population was relegated to second-class status and stigmatized as conquered people, according to Arnolde DeLeon, Andres Tijerina and others (DeLeon xii). That jealousy fed into conceptions of *losrinchas* marauding Mexican-hating vigilantes, and later incidents involving the Rangers and the civil rights action of the 1960s reinforced that collective opinion. In the 1960s, the Rangers were again scored and reorganized after intervening in the La Casita Farms strike in Rio Grande City, bringing back memories of the past problems they had helped solve with trademark force and ruthlessness (Chandler 249; Webb 452).

Texas historians suggest that while the Rangers acted to protect the Texas frontier and local communities from depredations, they also caused quite a bit of havoc in the process (Paredes 30). Such is the nature of citizen-type movements organized to treat in expediency situations that a detached federal government cannot handle, and this is not endemic to Texas alone. Mexico during the reign of Porfirio Diaz had its *rurales*, a Ranger-like outfit that kept the peace on the northern frontier with the United States, often with the same heavy-handed style.

Tejano historian Trini Gonzalez, a Valley native, argues that when a citizenry finds themselves desperate for succor and at wit's end, they will either take up arms against their oppressor or employ surrogates to do so (Gonzalez, 2005). That ironically explains both

the concept of the Rangers, and the various responses of Hispanic Texans to the exploits of the Rangers. And it leads to the comparison of the Rangers with the Minutemen, a modern-day vigilante-style group that is starting to rekindle the same sort of reaction and response as their forebears did generations ago.

### **Comparison and Contrast**

In comparing the Minutemen to the Texas Rangers, several similarities are immediately apparent. The first has to do with their relation to the federal government, as each gained impetus from what they perceived as inadequate attempts by national forces to solve a local problem. The second involves the makeup of the groups; both were/are peopled by citizens in an unofficial capacity, though at various times the Rangers became quasi-official arms of the state's defense system. The third similarity is the racial conflict that both organizations have run headlong into through their efforts. The last main confluence concerns expediency, wherein the Minutemen and Rangers, acting to stem serious local trouble, threaten/threatened and/or violate/violated the basic laws of the land in making their stand.

Where the two groups diverge first is in the concept of violence. While the Rangers had little problem with aggressive enforcement, and at times put innocent people in the grave, the Minutemen have taken great pains to distance themselves from violence. Organizer Jim Gilchrist has stated that "a bloodless revolution is the only model that will work," and project volunteers are drilled at the beginning of their involvement with this remonstrance (The Minuteman Project 2). Another difference between the groups is organization. The Rangers prided themselves on impromptu action, and bucked against any sort of official, chronicled duties – Webb writes that this was one of the group's major drawbacks through history and led to its vilification at several junctures (Webb 452). The Minutemen, by contrast, are a grass-roots outfit but have taken on the trappings of a truly modern bureaucracy. Though organizers use 19th-century rhetoric – Simcox has written that volunteers need few possessions, only the right mind set – the group has a professional-quality Web site and has acted within the boundaries of established business techniques so far (The Minuteman Project 2).

The final difference between the vigilante-style groups in question is a technological one. The Rangers, especially in their pre-DPS days, operated at a time when mass communication was limited and therefore both publicity and accountability were at a minimum. The Minutemen, however, are creatures of the 21st century, and are willing to bring massive awareness upon themselves in efforts to popularize their goals and recruit members to join them. They have used the media to propagate an at times nativist ideology replete with symbolic rhetorical references to America's individualist, self-reliant past. In the process, the media have been quick to interrogate the group while granting it substantial publicity in the past year, fostering a dualism of awareness and accountability made possible by media's reach and saturation.

Along with these similarities and differences, there is also the lingering concept of perception. Initial interpretations of the Minutemen have been ideologically guided by the media and by other, long-term communicative techniques.

### **War of the Words**

Americo Paredes, famed Mexican historian and folklorist, has written many times about the hostility to authority engendered among Mexican Texans in response to the forced colonization of the area by Anglo settlers (Paredes 32). He opines that folklore, frequently narrative *corridos*, has been a weapon of psychic survival against the embarrassment and hardship stemming from being unfairly dominated by another people. And in *corridos*, one of the most popular subjects has been the Texas Rangers, as songs and other art forms have memorialized those Mexicans and Tejanos who fought against *los rinches* to defend their people (DeLeon 158).

Such narratives have also served the purpose of socializing the young, teaching them history and inculcating values, Paredes continues (DeLeon 164; Paredes 24). DeLeon and others have suggested that in the early days, newspapers also acted as politicizing and educative devices to spread the word to people about the depredations of the Rangers (DeLeon 201).

Today, the long memories of the Rangers in Texas are being perpetuated by various means, according to Trini Gonzales, as young Mexican Americans learn their past through different means than

word of mouth or frontier news. Since the ethnic explosion of awareness in the 1960s, which was a result of civil rights efforts across the board, the world of scholarship has opened up new vistas of representation possibilities. The majority of the academic writing on Texas and the Rangers in the past 20 years has been "counter scholarship," as different readings of the past by scholars more sympathetic to the plight of the Tejano population have abounded. Gonzalez suggests that this is part of the legacy of the 1960s: young people today, if interested, can explore the past with an even hand, as opposed to settling for what he and others call "one-sided traditional histories" (Gonzalez 2005).

And the media itself has become a battleground, especially in regard to the new Rangers, the Minutemen. Reporters from as far away as Europe have journeyed to the Southwest to investigate the Minutemen phenomenon, often framing their stories in adversarial populist tones valorizing the underdog (Goldberg 2). This in itself can be described as an outgrowth of the 1960s-style turning of the tables against majorities and authorities, another manifestation of the expanded palate of epistemological and political options that accrued from the political and social revolution of the era.

Communication scholar George Gerbner's cultivation theory states that as people pay more attention to media, they are more likely to form their ideologies and world views based on the material they watch and read (Severin and Tankard 268). This means that as the Minutemen and their adversaries battle for media publicity, more is at stake than just advertisement. The fanfare surrounding the Minutemen has pushed the immigration issue from the margins to a prime spot in national consciousness, as both sides use the Internet, radio and television talk shows, and political soapboxes to get their message across, hoping to cultivate in undecided media consumers the "right way" to conceptualize what is happening.

The employment of loaded rhetorical terms has been rampant so far, i.e. the use of "illegals" by the Minutemen and "migrants" by anti-Minutemen, to describe the principal objects of the ruckus. Each side is probably guilty of stereotyping the other in the war for media coverage, and appeal to high-sounding abstractions like "defending the homeland," and "human rights" have been thrown around as weapons more than they have been unpacked and explicated.

The bottom line is that for many Hispanic Texans, to see the Minutemen invading their area is to be reminded of the conquest of Mexican Texas by settlers over 150 years ago. They conjure memories of the depredations the Texas Rangers visited upon them, and memories that have been passed on by generation through various socialization techniques, meaning that a Spanish-speaking Texan comes to a consideration of the situation having been educated by friends, family, and increasingly school, into a reflexive distrust of any unofficial activist organization.

On the other hand, many Anglo Texans hear about the Minutemen, immediately think of the Texas Rangers, and are guided by their collective memories of that group as a vital part of having secured the life and liberty they enjoy today.

The Minutemen phenomenon has in essence revamped the racial and ethnic antagonism of bygone days, while also laying bare the necessity for a reasonable solution to the dilemma of immigration in the Southwest. It has called to arms longstanding ideologies and collective memories on both sides of the divide, complicating efforts to reach an amicable agreement on a topic that has traditionally been clouded by rhetoric, historical interpretation, and political jingoism.



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*Curandero: A Life in Mexican Folk Healing* by Eliseo "Cheo" Torres with Timothy L. Sawyer, Jr, 170 pp, with illus, paper, \$14.95, ISBN 0-8263-3640-X, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2005.

### **Reviewed by Servando Z. Hinojosa**

Upon reading the book, I quickly discerned the learning tradition at the root of folk medicine, as experienced by the first author, Torres. The book places great emphasis on the family-centered and informal pathways of knowledge through which Mexican folk healing is taught, and how these are quite often framed by social hardship. I teach a class called Mexican American Folk Healing at my university and I see the value of personal reportage in building a larger portrait of the curanderismo tradition. Students and casual readers can connect well with this approach.

As the volume moves back and forth in time, and across the Mexican border and back, it chronicles the lifelong exposure

of Torres to folk medicine. Its pages recount a conversation between Torres and his father, when he learned about Aztec medicinal knowledge, and later one between himself and a hierbería (folk medicine shop) owner, where he learned about the piedra imán lodestone. The contributions of Spanish, Moorish, and Indian sources to Mexican folk medicine are pointed out along the way. To his credit, Torres admits that he sometimes professed too much knowledge to his erstwhile teachers, something which later served him as a lesson in humility and honesty.

Torres and Sawyer include a few historical photographs of the folk healers Niño Fidencio, Don Pedrito Jaramillo, and Teresita Urrea of Mexico. One photo of Niño Fidencio performing surgery on a woman's knee tumor is especially memorable. They add a lot to the pages. Other photos show the boxes of herbs and artifacts that Torres uses in his teaching and community outreach activities. Their inclusion reminds readers of the corpus of plants, minerals, and religious iconography that Mexican American curanderismo makes such active use of.

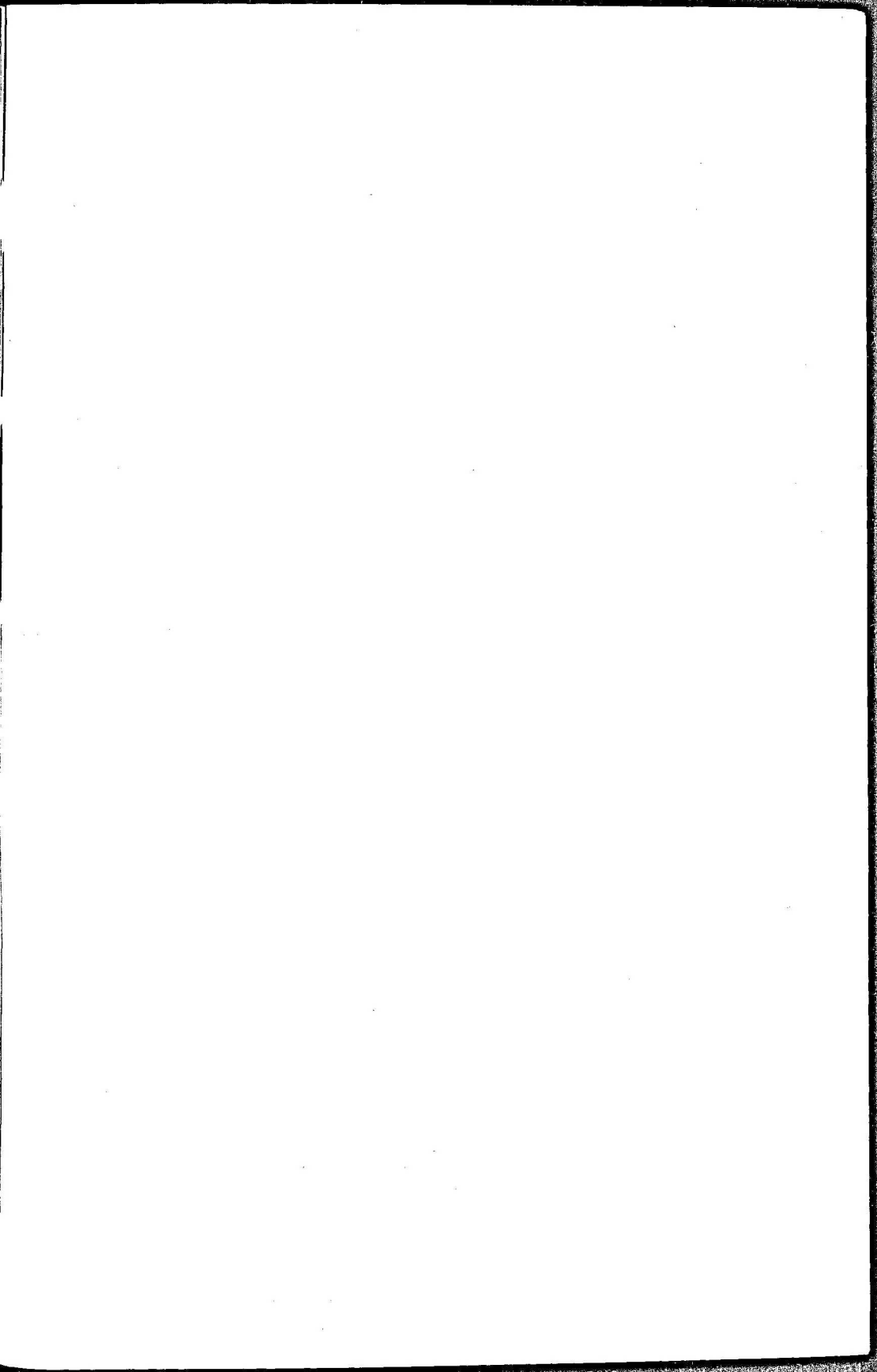
Still, the authors' approach to providing accounts of healing and of the healing properties of plants is uneven in some places. The narrative at times moves from relations of personal history, to descriptions of particular plant resources, to references to culture-bound syndromes. The resulting collage that the authors probably intended sometimes seems too unstructured, and does not cover plants or syndromes to the extent that some readers may want, or at a level their professional training may require, especially if they work in the health field.

At the end of the book, the authors tell of how Torres has brought curanderismo into his teaching curriculum at the University of New Mexico, and of how it can fill an important role in contemporary health care. Torres stresses the place of curanderismo alongside other complementary and alternative medicine modalities which are better-known among an increasing sector of the public.

For all its stylistic limitations and abbreviated content, though, Torres and Sawyer's book can still kindle interest in folk medicine, a domain of study with great promise for the social sciences. The book can also help clinicians begin developing their Mexican and Mexican American folk medicine vocabulary. In different

classroom settings, *Curandero: A Life in Mexican Folk Healing* could work best as an experiential adjunct to critical works on borderland public health and on folk knowledge distribution. At a more basic level, the book can help borderland students connect with a folk medicine presence in their family's past.

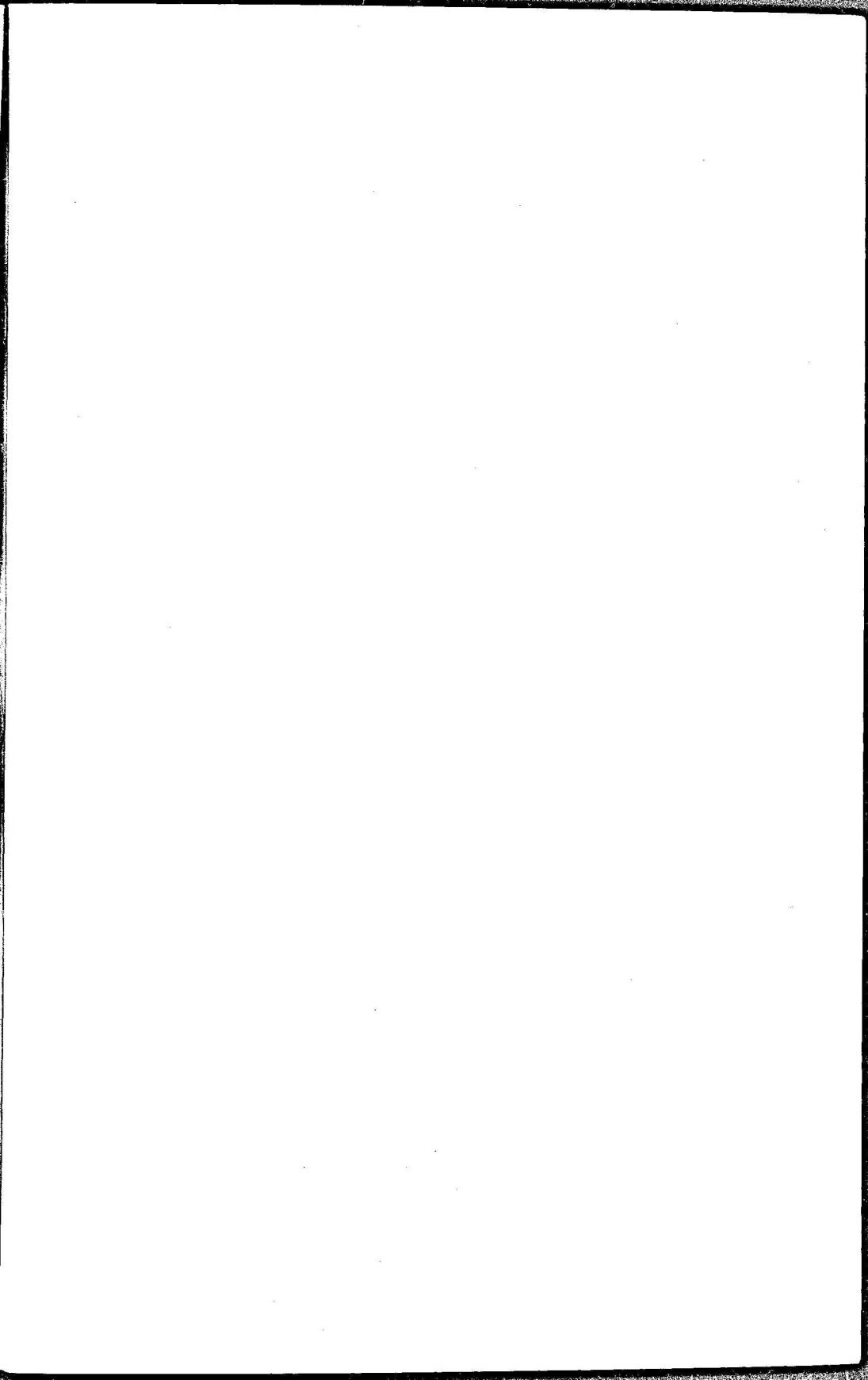






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