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Cultural Icons of Mexico's Northwest Borderlands

Robert McKee Irwin

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INTRODUCTION

LET ME BEGIN BY SKETCHING a few scenes from Mexico's northwestern borderlands in the latter half of the nineteenth century:

A middle-aged woman wandered through downtown Hermosillo hawking trinkets in the street. She was dressed as a Seri Indian and her facial tattoos indicated that she was not merely donning a costume. Yet her physical features were clearly those of a white woman. Locals might have guessed her identity, recalling the story of a lovely *criolla* carnival queen who had been taken captive by Seri warriors, then seduced by the savage allure of their chief. The marriage of a privileged *criolla* to an enemy leader—for the Seri, seen as the most savage of the indigenous groups of Mexico's northwestern borderlands, remained autonomous and at war with "civilized" Mexico—was still shocking to the Sonorans who recognized Lola Casanova as she passed through the rapidly modernizing city of Hermosillo.

Perhaps around the same time, a livestock rancher in northern Sonora lived out his last years in anonymity. He managed to do so despite the fact that he had been a hero to Mexicans of the borderlands a few decades earlier. Having migrated north as a young man to seek his fortune in gold rush California, he was violently disillusioned by the

brutal racism of Anglophone settlers. After witnessing the rape of his wife and murder of his brother, and suffering countless personal humiliations, he turned into a vengeful social bandit, terrorizing all Alta California. Some believed he had been hunted down by government agents, and that his severed head, preserved in alcohol in a large jar, proved his death; others knew that that head was not actually his, and that Joaquín Murrieta had made his heroic escape back to Sonora where he would live a long and productive life.

This was also the time that a lady from Guaymas was belatedly lauded for her heroism of a few decades earlier. Count Gaston de Raousset Boulbon, the gallant French filibuster, had led an invasion of the Mexican Northwest from Alta California, with the intention of liberating the region from Mexican oppression and opening up the prospect of French colonization. Raousset was rebuffed not only by the Mexican military but also by local residents, including an Indian teenager who would grow up to be the most fearsome Yaqui rebel ever to challenge Mexican authority, and a very proper upper-class lady who could not condone bad manners even in a desperate filibuster. But the heroine of the day was not the notorious Cajeme nor the elegant Guadalupe Cubillas, but a modest housewife, Loreto Encinas de Avilés, who ran through the streets of Guaymas, wailing baby in her arms, sounding the warning that the French filibusters were about to attack.

Also in this long ago era, a young *mestiza* girl began exercising astounding curative powers and preaching a rhetoric criticizing the oppression of indigenous peasants at the hands of the government and the Catholic Church. She became a living saint to many, inspiring numerous rebellions and eventually prompting President Porfirio Díaz to banish her to Arizona, where she would continue to incite revolt. She was a veritable Mexican Joan of Arc, and her adventures presaged the Mexican revolution, but Teresa Urrea, La Santa de Cabora, would die a humble death in the United States where she would no longer be revered as a healer but mocked as an example of backward Mexican superstitiousness.

These anecdotes, all products of history, legend, gossip, and literary imagination, hint at some of the cultural meanings conveyed by these icons of the contact zone that is the U.S.–Mexico border. Many of these

figures play a role in national history. Others are better known in the United States than in Mexico. Yet none are as significant to any national imaginary as they are to that of the borderlands. Their stories—as they develop over time, diverging and shifting, intersecting, echoing, and contradicting each other—signify heavily on borderlands culture. They are cultural icons whose multiple and ever-changing histories define the culture of Mexico's northwestern borderlands in the late nineteenth century as distinct from that of either Mexico or the United States, or even of the U.S. southwestern borderlands. The contact zone of the Mexican Northwest developed a culture very much its own following the U.S.–Mexico war of the 1840s, a multilayered culture whose relations to the cultures of the Mexican national mainstream, the imperialist United States, and its emerging Mexican American minority of the Southwest are indicative of the complex web of social and cultural hierarchies that ruled everyday life in North America in the era of manifest destiny.

Frontier Territory

In 1848, a monumental change occurred in the area of Mexico that is today the country's northwestern borderlands. The present Mexican state of Sonora and surrounding territories including the Baja California peninsula and western Chihuahua, which had once been situated in the middle of Mexico's vast northwestern frontier territories—more or less in the middle of nowhere, far away from central Mexico and farther away from any foreign country—now found themselves sharing a border with the United States, a country that had just aggressively seized half of Mexico's lands and seemed poised to grab for more.

The Spanish word "frontera" can be translated to English as "border," "borderlands," or "frontier." The case of the area that became in 1848 Mexico's northwestern borderlands makes clear the inadequacy of the Spanish term. While "border" is a term designating very clearly the delimitations between two entities—regardless whether such a delimitation can ever really be defined with precision—"borderlands" and "frontier" are much broader terms, both referring to extensive swaths of territory, and neither implying clear-cut limits of any kind. In

nationalistic terms, a "frontier" is an area located far from the center of the nation, a peripheric zone that abuts not a neighboring nation but unconquered wilderness. Mexico's northwestern frontier territories in the early 1800s were vast terrains, sparsely populated by a mix of *criollo* settlers and indigenous peoples, distant from the nation's center in terms of transportation, communication, and culture. Largely unprotected by the national military, Mexican settlers struggled with the unconquered indigenous groups for whom these territories had been an undisputed homeland for generations. Although in Spanish colonial times many native peoples had been more or less subdued in frontier missions and gradually assimilated into Mexican *criollo* culture, others remained in violent rebellion against white colonizers, making some parts of the region virtually uninhabitable by *criollos*. Thus, alongside the tales of glory of northwestern Mexico's early *criollo* pioneers exist parallel sagas of the heroic defense of native lands by tenacious indigenous nations, such as those of the Seris and the Yaquis.

The Borderlands

When in 1848 these frontier territories abruptly became Mexico's northwestern borderlands—a territory no longer fading out into an ever more barbarous oblivion but directly adjoining a powerful and rapidly modernizing neighbor—all the issues outlined above remained and would be further complicated by the region's new role as defense outpost against potential incursions by the increasingly imperialistic United States. The rhetoric of manifest destiny evoked threat after threat of invasion, annexation, or colonization of northwestern Mexico, if not by the United States itself, then by U.S.–based adventurers. The attraction to California of adventurers from all over the world, seeking their fortunes in the gold rush of 1849, further complicated the cultural mix of the borderlands, and soon northwestern Mexico became the target of California–based French invaders as well. In addition, as parts of the Mexican Northwest began to develop economically, immigration to Alta California spread south, leading to new cultural conflicts as Mexicans struggled to live alongside new arrivals—most notably, immigrants from China—who brought with them cultural practices utterly incomprehensible to

Mexican *fronterizos*. If that were not enough, the Mexican borderlands' proximity to the United States (and distance from central Mexico), notwithstanding whatever antagonisms were in play at any moment, brought about an economic interdependency that would closely link Mexican *fronterizos* to their northern neighbors. Such associations were often painful, as Mexico's image in the United States was hardly that of an equal partner. Mexico's *fronterizos* needed to confront and correct Yankee prejudices in order to better foster the economic relationships on which their project of modernization depended. This push and pull with their new neighbor, along with the increased clashes brought about by growing internationalization, further complicated the already conflictive state of social and cultural relations in the region.

A Cultural Contact Zone

According to Mary Louise Pratt, a "contact zone" is a social space "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" ("Arts" 34). Pratt, seeking new critical paradigms to address contemporary trends of globalization, proposes "an optic that decenters community (and its corollary, identity) to focus on how social bonds operate across lines of difference, hierarchy, and unshared or conflicting assumptions" ("Criticism" 88). Rather than setting about to draw conclusions regarding national culture, Pratt suggests that "a contact zone perspective decenters community to look at how signification works across and through lines of difference and hierarchy[;] . . . borders are placed . . . at the center of concern while homogeneous centers move to the margins" (ibid.).

I would add that a critical approach that focuses on zones of cultural contact may be productive not only to address contemporary "postnational" concerns. In fact, in many if not all historical moments and local contexts, official or mainstream national culture is only one cultural force at work, always in dialogue with cultural production that voices perspectives of multiple cultural communities, whether they be communities of shared ethnic, gender, foreign national, class, religious, or other identities marginalized in a national context.

The border paradigm commonly used to address the contact zone between Mexico and the United States is useful, but limited in that it tends to imply a binary vision, composed only of a monolithic (white, Anglophone) United States, a monolithic (*mestizo*, Hispanophone) Mexico, and combinations thereof (often limited to the Mexican American hybrid). A contact zone perspective does not suggest a limitation to a binary view.[1] The culture of the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, after all, is the product of more than just a simple summation or fusion of two national cultures. The two national monoliths are present, but so are local perspectives based on, for example, class and ethnic identities as well as other national affiliations (including, as we will see, Chilean, French, and Chinese).

The recent surge of interest in the multicultural U.S. Southwest has made "border studies" into a major node of inquiry in the context of both American studies and Latin American studies. Studies of the borderlands emphasize "local relations of conflict and cooperation among ethnic and linguistic communities and the relative autonomy and heterogeneity of their cultural practices with respect to national centers" (Gruesz 91–10). This is certainly the case of the U.S. Southwest, undoubtedly one of the key contact zones Kirsten Silva Gruesz had in mind when she articulated the concept cited above.

However, a similar interest in the Mexican Northwest as a contact zone or as an integral part of a larger cross-border contact zone has not materialized. Like the U.S. Southwest, the Mexican Northwest has a long history of conflicts between white colonizers and often resistant indigenous groups. As in the U.S. Southwest, clashes between Mexican and U.S. cultures have been a part of everyday life for over one hundred fifty years. And parallel to the U.S. Southwest's history of receiving immigrants from all over the world, the Mexican Northwest's history also reflects the interest of certain foreign populations (such as the Chinese or the French) in migrating to or even taking over the region. Finally, the Mexican Northwest, particularly in the late nineteenth century, shares with the U.S. Southwest a distance from its nation's center that not only locates it on the periphery of national culture but at times puts it at odds with the national. The Mexican Northwest, the "other borderlands," would appear to be as exemplary a cultural contact zone

as the U.S. Southwest, and it is time that it received significant attention within a framework of inquiry that goes beyond the regional or the national.

To understand the complexities of cultural contact in the borderlands, it is necessary to gain access to multiple perspectives and to see how dialogues and rhetorical confrontations between different groups have played out in history. Therefore, rather than look at individual texts, I have chosen to look at multiple texts that treat similar subject matter. Nick Couldry proposed a "cultural studies" methodology of textual analysis based on a "textual environment," a context of intertextual dialogue formed by "(a) flows of texts, (b) flows of meaning (across and within texts), and (c) movements of potential readers within (a) and (b)" (80). The idea is to study not "texts as objects" but "textual processes" of (multiple) signification (86). I have chosen to work with several cultural icons of the late-nineteenth-century borderlands: figures who appear and reappear at multiple historical moments, and from multiple cultural contexts. The intercultural dialogue that results around these icons through literature, journalism, historiography, film, legend, and so on facilitates insight into the dynamics of cultural relations among the multiple groups sharing the space of the contact zone of the U.S.–Mexico borderlands.

Cultural Icons of the Borderlands

The term "cultural icon" is one common in everyday usage, but poorly treated in academic discourse. Part of the reason for this is that it is a concept that has come into common use only recently, and usually only to refer to figures associated with mass communication and consumerism. However, it is a particularly useful category for interrogating the context of a cultural contact zone because it is a robust category that allows for multiplicities of meaning in ways that similar discursive genres such as myth and legend do not.

The term "legend," for example, tends to refer to a story belonging to a particular place and a particular people. Legends tend to exist outside history or in opposition to official history. They exist in popular culture, representing oral traditions and folklore. While legends'

protagonists may have a life beyond the context of the legends about them, their roles in history, literature, or film tend to be seen as separate from their participation in legend. Often the legend is seen as a source text on which other stories are based, although it is the legend and not the stage play or the historic facts that carries the weight of cultural meaning for those to whom the legend belongs.

Myth is something more culturally weighty than legend because, as Roland Barthes asserts, "it transforms history into nature" (129). While a legend does bear cultural meaning, it does so in a less narrow way. Legendary characters may be rough, shape shifting, and contradictory. La Santa de Cabora of borderlands lore was at once an innocent girl and a hard-nosed revolutionary; she is not a mythological character because she is not a "poor, incomplete [image], where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for a signification" (Barthes 127). She is too messy for that: her meaning is variable, debatable. While some have tried to make a myth of her (as the Mexican Joan of Arc), her baroque image resists. Barthes writes:

> Myth . . . purifies [things], it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact . . . In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics . . . , it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth. (143)

A cultural icon is not a myth because its iconic status is dependent upon dialectics and multiple layers of meanings. A "cultural icon" is, according to a pair of dictionary definitions, either "a very famous person or thing considered as representing a set of beliefs or a way of life" *(Cambridge International Dictionary)* or "a person or thing regarded as a representative symbol, especially of a culture or movement" *(Oxford English Dictionary)*. Nicola Miller, who studies Latin American intellectuals as cultural icons, understands the latter as "artifacts of veneration," "objects of consumerism," and "vehicles of facilitation, . . . symbolic of values, desires and options" (62).

Miller concludes her study of such icons as José Martí, José Carlos

Mariátegui, and Gabriela Mistral by stating that "icons are touchstones of . . . 'intrinsic meaning': they are telling about the cultural concerns of any particular moment in history" (75). Cultural icons are more than legends because they exceed the confines of the narrative story; they are capable of producing meaning on their own, outside of their stories. As protagonists of multiple stories, their meanings differ among different audiences; they are not myths, evocative of fixed essences. For this reason, I question Nicola Miller's final statement about cultural icons; to reiterate, she claims that icons "are telling about the cultural concerns of any particular moment in history, but . . . *do not allow for tension, conflict or debate* about those concerns" (75, emphasis mine).

Miller's objective is to understand how major Latin American intellectuals came to be not only icons of their national cultures but also agents of unification to Latin American culture as a whole, and it is not my point to argue about whether figures like Diego Rivera and Gabriel García Márquez really signify strongly and univocally to the point of silencing tension, conflict, and debate within a national or continental context. However, I will argue that a cultural icon of the borderlands can only be constructed around the inevitable tensions, conflicts, and debates that determine the cultural complexity of a contact zone.

Yet another reference defines a cultural icon as

> a famous individual who has transcended "mere" celebrity to come to represent a given *Zeitgeist* to a sizable part of the world. As such, a cultural icon is not simply a *famous face* but a complex, multi-layered personage who reflects the conflicts and contradictions of his or her time. (*The Free Dictonary.com*, emphasis in original)

Given that the focus of this study is precisely on the cultural conflicts of the borderlands and the contradictions in interpretation of their histories in different places or among different groups, the cultural icon would seem to be a most useful critical tool. An icon may incorporate legend or even myth but is not limited to a single story or cultural meaning. An icon more likely attains its status as such for its elasticity, its attractiveness to multiple peoples, and its ability to signify differently in multiple contexts.

This study, then, employs the cultural icon concept to look at how

multiple groups including Mexicans and gringos, Chicanos and Chileans, Seris and Cherokees, intellectuals and balladeers, novelists and filmmakers, politicians and neighborhood gossips, opposition journalists and state historians have all appropriated well-known figures of borderlands legend and retold their stories, creating meanings for their own audiences. The cultural icons of the borderlands in fact thrive on the tensions and conflicts their stories arouse in the multiple agents of their telling. My objective, then, is to analyze the shifting and conflicting significations communicated by the often-told stories surrounding these borderlands icons at the many different moments and in the many different cultural contexts in which they are produced and reproduced, interpreted and reinterpreted.

While the focus is on icons that emerged in the late nineteenth century, and significant attention is paid to the representations of those icons during that timeframe, all of them have lived on into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and their meanings have continued to evolve over time. Their cultural meanings have also varied significantly according to the context in which the retellings of their stories have been produced and the ideological goals and prejudices of those who have produced those retellings. While the stories behind the icons may have common origins and share some key elements, the meanings conveyed are different when produced for a postrevolutionary Mexican nation audience, for one of the manifest destiny–era U.S. Southwest, for surviving twentieth-century indigenous cultures of the borderlands, for late-twentieth-century Chicanos, and so on. This comparative study aims to understand the contact zone centered on the Mexican Northwest through an interpretive reading of the multicultural dialogues about a handful of the region's cultural icons.

A Transnational Approach

While traditional historiography or literary criticism might work well to capture many of the important elements of the cultural diversity of the borderlands, such approaches often fail to grasp their transnational significance. Regional histories and literary histories of the Mexican Northwest tend to lock themselves into national contexts in terms of

both bibliography and the conclusions they draw. Despite obvious similarities, no one has ever compared the Lola Casanova legend to *Ramona*, Helen Hunt Jackson's romantic novel of the U.S. Southwest. No one has ever explored the polemic between Mexican centrist nationalism, U.S. racism against Mexicans, and regional pride that led to the publication of the northwestern borderlands' first literary book, Aurelio Pérez Peña's *Heroína*.

But the links and antagonisms between the Mexican borderlands and the United States (and, likewise, the Mexican nation) are undeniable. The culture of the Mexican Northwest was often a more visible, tangible slice of Mexico to *gringos* of the Southwest than was a centrally produced and promulgated Mexican national culture; the borderlands often served as a synechdoche of the national for *gringos* looking for nearby investment opportunities and trading partners. On the other hand, *fronterizos* had to face *yanqui* misconceptions and prejudices about Mexico more directly than other Mexicans because of their proximity to and frequent dealings with their neighbors across the border. The culture of the borderlands reflects the ideas, feelings, and lifestyles of the people living in the borderlands, but it also reflects their reactions to other external representations of their culture that they must face. This study aims to capture this transnational aspect of cultural production by tracing out the cultural trajectories of these icons, all of which tend to travel and to produce multiple meanings about the borderlands from multiple locations.

While the discrete locations of cultural production mentioned above may be impossible to fully distinguish from each other (e.g., regional contexts often carry national implications; the minority discourse of U.S. Chicanos may also contain elements of U.S. nationalist or Mexican nationalist thinking), and it would be dangerous to make assumptions of purity regarding the identity categories implicitly associated with the writers and the intended readers of or the groups represented in the works discussed, for purposes of comparison most texts nonetheless can be linked most prominently to one context or another. I do not believe that in any case these categorizations are so rough or imprecise as to dilute the validity of the accompanying analysis.

Textual Analysis in a Preliterary Culture

This focus on diverse perspectives and meanings further draws the study beyond the confines of "la ciudad letrada"—that is, the region's elite urban *criollo* oligarchy of poets, historiographers, or essayists (Rama)—to intellectual outsiders, including less-educated classes and indigenous groups. The study's scope of inquiry includes literature, historiography, journalism, cultural criticism, legend, *corrido*, film, biography, even gossip—whatever sources are available—in order to construct as diverse a range of representation as possible.

Literary production in the northwestern borderlands in the late nineteenth century hardly existed. Regional historiography had scarcely come into being in those years. And although still a severely limited enterprise until essentially the last decade of the nineteenth century, journalism, on the other hand, was being produced in the region since the 1840s. Its analysis, along with that of the limited literary and historiographic sources of the period, does facilitate inquiry substantially. Letters, *corridos*, biographies, legends, and oral histories together with literature, historiography, and journalism constitute a mass of material substantial enough to draw interesting conclusions and to furthermore represent a diversity of views. For example, all these icons eventually became protagonists of important literary works, but each had existed quite prominently beforehand in popular legend.

In many cases, these icons' trajectory was from legend to literature to history, in that order. And although popular legend is the most ephemeral, least straightforward of these three forms to trace or fix, in this study it is the genre that most often informs all others. If the novels of Francisco Rojas González on Lola Casanova or of Brianda Domecq on Teresa Urrea are the best-known versions of these icons' stories, it is their immense popularity in local legend that made those novels possible.

And while traditional genre categories may in fact apply to the texts under examination here, a close examination reveals a multidirectional interdependency among genres. Borderlands historiography often bases itself on literature, on fiction—after all, Yellow Bird's Joaquín Murrieta novel was published long before Murrieta was admitted into historiography of any kind. The authority of eyewitness testimony asserts itself in literary fiction, the most prominent example being Heriberto Frías's novel *Tomóchic.* Legend and rumor inform chronicles that disguise themselves as history, as with tales of Lola Casanova that continue to circulate around western Sonora. Newspaper accounts and history texts often prove to be less reliable than novels—Brianda Domecq's literary portrait of La Santa de Cabora is certainly more believable than representations of Teresa Urrea in journals such as the *New York Times.* Literary critics trump official historiography on decades-old local legends, as Edith Lowell's M.A. thesis brings Seri versions of the Lola Casanova legend into dialogue with borderlands history. Despite the fact that two texts about the same cultural icon may not agree on much, all these narrative genres seem to inform each other and draw from each other in unpredictable ways, revealing the operation of what Néstor García Canclini calls interclass *mestizaje* (71). Elite urban *fronterizos* participate just as actively as peasant or indigenous classes in popular forms of cultural production such as oral history and legend, and these popular forms in turn invariably inform later reconstructions of these legends in literature and historiography. Journalism, a form of mass cultural production that caters both to wealthy elites and to the literate and semiliterate working classes, also serves as a cultural bridge, interpreting popular cultural expression from an elite perspective and planting seeds to promulgate legend. Guadalupe Cubillas's role in the filibuster Raousset Boulbon's surrender was not well known and might have been forgotten entirely had it not been reported in newspapers.

Bandits, Captives, Heroines, and Saints

The chapters that follow carry out this analysis of a diversity of texts about a handful of major cultural icons of the Mexican borderlands in order to draw from them cultural significations regarding (1) Mexican borderlands culture of the late nineteenth century, which is in fact the main object of inquiry here; (2) Mexican borderlands culture as it continued to evolve through the twentieth century; (3) Mexican national culture and how it has interpreted and influenced the culture of the northwestern borderlands at different historical moments; (4) U.S. culture and how it has understood, interacted with, and often drawn strong

responses from the culture of Mexico's northwestern borderlands; (5) the regional culture of the U.S. Southwest and how it has interacted with that of the region directly to its south, that of northwestern Mexico; (6) the increasingly substantial Mexican American culture of the United States and its own relationships to that of the Mexican Northwest; and (7) indigenous cultures of the Mexican borderlands, particularly as they remain apart from and often oppose the *criollo*, *mestizo*, and/or national mainstream at different times.

The first chapter, "The Other Borderlands," focuses on academic discourse and its neglect of Mexico's borderlands as such. It critiques American studies for paying lip service to postnationalism while remaining exclusively focused on the cultural production of the United States and for resisting multilingual or multinational dialogue, particularly in Spanish or with Mexican or Latin American scholarship. It likewise critiques Mexican studies for its addiction to nationalist premises that understand the northwest only as a region of the nation and not as a contact zone and neglect the regional diversity of indigenous Mexico. Latin American studies similarly has enthusiastically incorporated U.S. Latino/a cultures into its realm of inquiry without sufficiently expanding regional or minoritarian focus within the outdated area-studies paradigm on which the field was founded. The chapter finally advocates a transamerican approach to U.S.–Mexico border studies, an approach that highlights the importance of Mexico's northwestern borderlands—"the other borderlands"—in understanding the highly conflictive context of North America from a postnationalist perspective.

Each of the chapters that follows introduces the case of a particular icon or set of icons and traces out the evolution and multiple deterritorializations and reterritorializations of its representations over the past century and a half across the Americas (and sometimes beyond), and across multiple genres of cultural production.

Chapter 2, "The Many Heads and Tales of Joaquín Murrieta," reviews the multiple biographies of the social bandit from his childhood in Sonora to his vengeful rampage around Alta California and his decapitation (and beyond). It follows his jarred head around the museums of California even as Murrieta himself reportedly goes on living peacefully back home in Sonora, and traces his representations through a

series of shocking plagiarisms and unexpected recontextualizations that keep his name alive as an important cultural hero on both sides of the border—not to mention in Chile—to this day.

Chapter 3, "Lola Casanova: Tropes of *Mestizaje* and Frontiers of Race," looks at how regional written culture avoided the disturbing legend of Lola Casanova's rejection of white society and her marriage to a "savage" Indian—that is, until national culture briefly embraced it (only to rebuff it as too radically anti-Malinchista). Only then did regional culture reluctantly incorporate Lola Casanova—whose legend had lived on quite vigorously in popular oral histories of both Seri Indians and *criollo* and *mestizo* Sonorans—into its pantheon of cultural icons.

Chapter 4 takes a slightly different approach. Titled "The Heroines of Guaymas," it looks at the many competing versions of the history of the filibuster invasions of Gaston de Raousset Boulbon into Sonora in the early 1850s, drawing attention to how the addition to this borderlands drama of a number of local supporting players—Raousset's Mexican girlfriend; Doña Loreto Encinas de Avilés, the legendary heroine of Guaymas; Guadalupe Cubillas, whose rigid decorum elicited Raousset's surrender; José María Leyva, Mexican patriot turned Yaqui insurgent hero—transforms a simple conflict between Mexico and France into a complex representation of the borderlands in relation to both Mexico and the United States. In particular, the independent journalist Aurelio Pérez Peña's play *Heroína*, along with his journalism, reflects significantly on race relations in the borderlands and on the daunting and unavoidable shadow cast by the United States over the culture of the Mexican borderlands.

The final chapter, "Of Sedition and Spiritism: La Santa de Cabora," looks at the reception of the larger-than-life figure of Teresa Urrea in Mexico City, Sonora, Chihuahua, Arizona, New York, California, and elsewhere by worshippers, spiritists, government officials, protorevolutionaries, mothers of gravely ill children, and latter-day admirers. It traces her extraordinary life from the hut where she grew up as a bastard girl to the ranch of her wealthy father, to the town of Tomóchic where her worship as a living saint sparked one of the most bloody and horrific stories of the Porfiriato. It follows La Santa de Cabora into exile across

the border to Arizona and Texas, and later into California, where she embarked on a cross-country tour as a healer and performer.

The book closes with an epilogue that summarizes how the various icons in question have signified in the different cultural contexts in which they have come into play: those of the United States, the Chicano Southwest, indigenous Mexico, the Mexican nation, and the Mexican Northwest.

In order to piece together the shifting and conflictive meanings of these icons in the borderlands contact zone from which they emerged, it has been necessary to carry out a study that crosses borders of nation, language, time, discipline, and genre. This kind of methodology is what I believe border studies requires. Although my largely archival research has limited the scope of my project and forced me to favor certain kinds of sources over others (namely, those most likely to find their way into print, whether directly or indirectly, versus those more inaccessible to scholars of U.S. or Mexican literature or history—oral histories and legends, especially those of indigenous cultures), I believe its methodology has produced a sufficient diversity of representation to draw valuable conclusions regarding the complexities of the culture of the Mexican northwestern borderlands as seen from a transamerican perspective.

CHAPTER ONE

The Other Borderlands

UPON THE SIGNING of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, a new border was established between the United States and Mexico in western North America. Like the western United States, northwestern Mexico was "frontier" territory, populated only sparsely, except by indigenous groups, many of whom remained autonomous and unincorporated into the Mexican nation. Prior to 1848, Mexico's northwestern frontier also included the lands ceded to the United States as a result of the U.S.–Mexico war of 1846–48. Now suddenly Sonora and Baja California found themselves on the border, politically severed from their former Mexican frontier neighbors, territories that would become the U.S. states of California and Arizona. This does not, however, imply that Mexico's Northwest was to abruptly become culturally distinct from the new U.S. Southwest. Writes the Chicano cultural critic José David Saldívar: "First carved out in the midst of U.S. imperialism by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and the Gadsden Purchase (1853), the U.S.–Mexico borderlands have earned a reputation as a 'third country,' because our southern border is not simply Anglocentric on one side and Mexican on the other" (8).

Saldívar's 1997 study of borderlands culture, *Border Matters*, features readings of works by Mexican American artists and writers such as

Américo Paredes, Gloria Anzaldúa, and El Vez in a study that aims at the following: "By analyzing a broad range of cultural texts and practices (*corridos*, novels, poems, paintings, *conjunto*, punk and hip-hop songs, travel writing, and ethnography) and foregrounding the situated experiences facing Chicanos/as, *Border Matters* puts forth a model for a new kind of U.S. cultural studies, one that challenges the homogeneity of U.S. nationalism and popular culture" (ix). Saldívar's book, then, is not about the entirety of U.S.–Mexico borderlands experience as the prior quote implies, but about the borderlands of Chicanos/as, a borderlands positioned against "the homogeneity of U.S. nationalism"; in other words, it is about the U.S. Southwest.

Border Matters is an important book because it took the lead in a movement on the part of scholars of Mexican American culture in the United States to "remap American cultural studies" to reflect the heterogeneity of U.S. culture, particularly with regard to its Chicano components. This incursion of identity politics into the field of American studies, frequently through scholarship categorizing itself as "border studies," has transformed the field.[1] The "new" American studies now advertises itself as "multicultural," "postnationalist," and even "transamerican."[2] Yet, most of these projects of borderlands cultural studies limit themselves at the border, as if the U.S. Southwest were detached culturally from the Mexican Northwest. This of course was not the case in 1848, nor is it so today.

Referring to the establishment of the new national border in the mid-nineteenth century, the historian Oscar Martínez writes:

> Mexican Americans . . . and Mexicans felt deeply the impact of the boundary in the formation of lifestyles, attitudes, and cultural orientations. Although the border separated Mexican Americans politically from Mexico, physical proximity kept them tied to their roots culturally and socially . . . Their compatriots . . . on Mexican soil found themselves insulated from American political domination but not from economic and cultural influences; that reality, coupled with sheer geographic remoteness from the core of the nation, assured that the *norteños* or *fronterizos* . . . would develop societal patterns distinct from the rest of Mexico. Thus the presence of the border played a fundamental role in converting border Chicanos and Mexicans into entities that stood apart from the mainstream societies of each nation. (*Troublesome Border* 5)

Nonetheless, the great interest in understanding the borderlands of the U.S. Southwest has obscured the Mexican borderlands from scholarly inquiry in the U.S. academy. This chapter looks at how border studies has taken shape in Mexico and the United States from multiple perspectives and in multiple contexts, paying particular attention to the treatment of Mexico's northwestern borderlands of the late nineteenth century.

Its focus, then, is decidedly not national. While the national perspectives of Mexico and of the United States will be considered, particularly as they are applied to the discursive evolution of the various icons in question here, the point is not to use the cultural history of the Mexican borderlands in order to better understand U.S. national paradigms. I believe it is a greater priority to break ground on studying the Mexican borderlands from a transamerican perspective without centering the study on the United States. Nor is my purpose to revise Mexican national paradigms from the perspective of the national periphery. I assume here that U.S. and Mexican national cultures are already sufficiently well understood. The point of border studies is to shift the focus to key contact zones such as the Mexican Northwest to better understand cultural relations among multiple groups (not just nations).

Mexico's Borderlands in American Studies

American studies, including the related fields of Chicano studies and southwestern studies, has been a major locus of scholarly investigation regarding the U.S.–Mexican borderlands. The best of such investigations have contributed strongly to what Ramón Saldívar articulates to be "an opposition reconstruction of American literary history"—and of U.S. cultural history in general ("Narrative Ideology" 20). However, the decentering process in American studies is not new to the last few decades. Many have located an important moment in American studies with regard to the borderlands in the 1890s with Frederick Jackson Turner's historic address to the American Historical Association,"The Significance of the Frontier in American History."[3] Turner famously

vector of historical inquiry with his publication of *The Spanish Borderlands* (1921). Bolton challenged then conventional notions of U.S. history's having origins only in the East and in English colonialism. Bolton promoted the incorporation of the Spanish colonial heritage of the U.S. South and West into the field of U.S. history. Bolton did not sell his turn to the borderlands as a potentially new dominant paradigm of inquiry for U.S. historians but as an important interrogation that had until then been excluded from national historiography. His Spanish borderlands confined itself initially to the U.S. side of the border; however, eventually the "Bolton school" would go on to expand its work into Latin American history, most particularly the history of Mexico, extending U.S. history into a much more broadly defined history of the Americas. Bolton wrote for a U.S. audience, his goal being to open the minds of U.S. history students beyond the limits of traditional U.S. history studied in isolation from its geographical context in the Americas. Bolton most clearly articulated his vision in 1932 in his own address to the American Historical Association,"The Epic of Greater America," in which he recalled Turner's frontier thesis when he asked, "Who has tried to state the significance of the frontier in terms of the Americas?" (quoted in Weber, 36), only to go on to challenge its limitations.

Bolton's work, focused as it was on colonial times, did little to draw attention beyond U.S. culture, except by pointing toward its distant Spanish colonial past. Many in the United States were already familiar with the Spanish past through novels such as Helen Hunt Jackson's exceedingly popular *Ramona*, an emblematic text in the late-nineteenth-century construction of the U.S. Southwest's "Spanish fantasy heritage." This nostalgic reinvention of pre-nineteenth-century Alta California was animated by "gracious Spanish grandees, beautiful *señoritas*, and gentle Catholic friars [who] oversaw an abundant pastoral empire worked by contented mission Indians" (David Gutiérrez 70). This idyllic construction of New Spain contrasts distinctly with U.S. notions of Mexican culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which portrayed Mexico as backward, uncultured, corrupt, and immoral. Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s remained a discrete and inferior other, unrelated to U.S. culture except in its Spanish colonial past, which it shared with part of the United States. Contemporary Mexico, along with its literature,

historiography, and popular culture, was of little interest to the Bolton school.[6]

Unfortunately, Bolton's was not a first step that would invoke others to exceed his intentions and further recontextualize U.S. cultural history and the notion of America in hemispheric terms. American studies in general has been largely guided, historically, by what some have called the "myth and symbol school," which promoted a series of traditional icons, metaphors, heroes, rituals, and narratives that together formed the basis of collective consciousness and national subjectivity.[7] It was not until the last decades of the twentieth century that another major intellectual movement would again push the U.S. Southwest to the forefront of American studies, this time as the field was driven to pay the Mexican American culture of the southwestern borderlands significant attention. The rise of Chicano studies drew the intellectual focus of American studies away from mainstream cultural myths to the margins of U.S. culture with explorations of such themes as migration, hybridity, cultural conflict and resistance, and intercultural influence. This time, Mexico's role was not that of an idealized colonial era past; the context of the borderlands profoundly linked U.S. and Mexican histories and contemporary cultures in ways that had been ignored as much by Boltonians as by Turnerians and adherents to traditional American studies methods.

José David Saldívar proclaimed in 1997 that "the invocation of the U.S.–Mexico border as a paradigm of crossing, resistance, and circulation in Chicano/a studies has contributed to the 'worlding' of American studies and further helped to instill a new transnational literacy in the U.S. academy" (xiii). The term "worlding" is misleading, however; Chicano studies certainly brought multiple perspectives into American studies discourse and rightfully recognized Mexican culture's presence in U.S. culture both in the borderlands as well as in the national mainstream. Still, Chicano studies' center of inquiry by definition was the Mexican American population of the United States, and as a result its studies of the borderlands have always tended to focus on the U.S. side of the border. In some ways, this limitation is perfectly reasonable: the Mexican American culture of the U.S. Southwest deserves to be recognized as an important and long-standing force in U.S. culture. Still this

U.S. bias has produced some unintended side effects that have caused a problematic imbalance in scholarly production on the borderlands in general, as we will see.

Another recent trend in American studies is the "postnationalist" impulse. The goal of this movement is to make American studies "less insular and parochial, and more internationalist and comparative," and "to revise the cultural nationalism and celebratory American exceptionalism" of previous generations (Curiel et al. 2). It aims to be "critical of U.S. hegemony and the constructedness of both national myths and national borders" (Curiel et al. 3). Among its gripes with American studies is the field's tendency to produce a homogeneous vision of U.S. national culture and history. Regarding the role of Mexican Americans: "Chicanos . . . remain perpetual latecomers, cast in the role of 'recent' immigrants and foreign nationals, as if the War with Mexico did not predate the Civil War" (Curiel et al. 4).

Here, the field of American studies is clearly responding to Saldívar and other U.S. Chicana/o border theorists of recent years whose work has challenged the disciplinary and linguistic bounds of American studies. However, the degree to which this new postnationalist American studies truly goes beyond the borders of the United States is open to question. The work of Chicano studies scholars has certainly drawn attention to the inadequacy of nationalist paradigms to discuss the southwestern borderlands. Chicano studies and postnationalist American studies scholars then are reading U.S. national culture from the multiple perspectives of the United States' multiethnic population and its many communities of immigrants (and their descendents) from all over the world—which is not the same thing as truly expanding American studies beyond national geopolitical boundaries. The borderlands of postnationalist American studies still tends to limit itself quite strictly at the U.S. border, as if it were being patrolled by the immigration police.

In her 2004 presidential address to the American Studies Association, Shelley Fisher Fishkin asserted, "if the circle of critics and colleagues with whom we regularly share our work all live in the United States, if we assume the subject of our study is by definition what transpires within U.S. borders, and if all are comfortable reading or speaking no language but English, many of us see nothing amiss. We may

snicker at the residents of Gopher Prairie for their conviction that 'Main Street is the apex of civilization.' But shouldn't we recognize the hint of a similar arrogance and ignorance at work when we assume that the United States represents the apex of American Studies scholarship, and that whatever American academics 'do not know' can't possibly be worth knowing?" (36). This is not to say that the project of postnationalist American studies is not transformative—it has indeed expanded the field of inquiry of American studies and posed productive challenges to commonly accepted notions of American history and culture. Still, it must not overstate its case.

For an example, let us turn briefly to the recent anthology *Postnationalist American Studies* (2000), edited by John Carlos Rowe. The chapter that focuses most on the U.S.–Mexico borderlands is the excellent analysis by Shelley Streeby of the Joaquín Murrieta legend in gold-rush-era California (see chapter 2). Murrieta was born in Sonora and migrated to Alta California in the early 1850s. His legend has taken many forms, and Murrieta has played many roles, from criminal desperado to social bandit to soldier of *la raza*. His story has been told and retold many times both in the U.S. Southwest and in Sonora (and elsewhere). Yet Streeby's "postnationalist" reading of the Murrieta story cites no Sonoran sources. In fact, its only two Spanish-language sources were both published in the United States, and despite its focus on *corridos*, it leaves out M. A. Serna Maytorena's *En Sonora así se cuenta* (1988), the definitive study on Sonoran *corridos*, which includes three different versions of the Murrieta ballad. A suggested teaching syllabus provided by Streeby includes no Spanish-language or Mexican sources at all. True, her focus is not Sonora but 1848 California. Nonetheless, a glance at the circumstances that brought Murrieta from Sonora to California and the differing significations of his myth back in his homeland would have added an interesting postnationalist perspective to the story, and the only way to engage effectively in a postnationalist context is to open dialogue with the scholarship produced abroad, if only just across the border.

The "new" American studies, like postnationalist American studies, pays lip service in its most recent incarnation to its pretensions of "address[ing] the problems of understanding the many different societies

of the western hemisphere and its strategic border zones" (Rowe, *New American Studies* xv), and to its claims that "we should know that today the study of U.S. cultures is necessarily bilingual" (xvii). It insists that its "new interest in border studies should include investigations of how the many different Americas have historically influenced and interpreted each other" (53). It proposes "establishing intellectual and cultural contact zones where a certain dialectics or dialogics of cultural exchange is understood to be a crucial aspect of how the field of American Studies is constituted and how the related territories of the Americas and the United States ought to be understood" (57). Once again its intentions challenge racist and imperialist biases of the field, but in practice so far it has been disappointing.

John Carlos Rowe, whose proposals, quoted above, point to a new comparativist movement in American studies, and who also edited the above-mentioned definitive anthology on postnationalist American studies, does little to back up his lofty ideas. In his own essay on Joaquín Murrieta (and it is telling that in it he uses the common Anglophone spelling, "Murieta"), a text focused on the 1854 John Rollin Ridge novel and U.S. "Indian removal" policy, he makes no citation of any Latin American or Spanish-language text. There is no evidence of the Murrieta legend's circulation in a multilingual contact zone. The article, taken from Rowe's book *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism* (2000),[8] in fact does just what the author himself warns the new American studies against: "comparative cultural study can often reinforce, rather than transform, national and cultural hierarchies and even contribute to the sort of cultural imperialism it is intended to criticize and overcome" (*New American Studies* xvi). By ignoring scholarship written in Spanish and produced in Latin America, Rowe's and Streeby's scholarship perform just such an act of intellectual imperialism. Mexican and Spanish-language scholarship is routinely rendered invisible by American studies scholarship, even that which exhibits the best intentions of inclusiveness. Postnationalist American studies may indeed promote the U.S.–Mexico borderlands as a major center of intellectual inquiry, but it is a center skewed ever northward that still firmly maintains an apparently impenetrable intellectual wall at its Mexican edge.

For a Mexicanist observer of the posturing of the new Americanists,

It was uncovered as an archaeological artifact might be, buried deep in the archives of the Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley, only a few years ago.

The Mexican borderlands literary critic María Socorro Tabuenca mounts a rigorous attack on border studies in the United States, claiming that its obsessive and exclusive focus on the U.S. side of the border has "resulted in the invisibilization of the literature that originates in the northern borderlands of Mexico" (86).[10] In a more recent collaboration, Mexico-based Tabuenca and the U.S.–based Mexicanist Debra Castillo argue:

> It is important either to take both sides—the United States and Mexico—into consideration or to be specific about which side one is going to talk about or study and to recognize the material and metaphorical differences involved in such transnational analyses. Otherwise, the "intellectual colonialism" from which the Mexican border has suffered to this day will be perpetuated. (4)

They go on to point out that while Chicano literature may occupy a marginal, minority position in U.S. culture, "when it is put into the perspective of a transborder literary project, the disparity vis-à-vis Mexican border literature is clear" (6).

Castillo and Tabuenca recognize that part of the reason why Mexican border literature occupies a subordinate place in relation to U.S.—including Chicano—border literature is the fact that northern Mexico's publishing industry is smaller and more poorly funded. Fewer books are published, and those that do get printed see a smaller distribution. The same applies to borderlands criticism and historiography. There is a greater abundance of U.S.–based border studies criticism, and there is a greater access to academic journals and university presses that publish in English. However, this is not an excuse for the new American studies to fail to seek out Mexican scholarship. As Kirsten Silva Gruesz puts it regarding her own "transamerican" approach to American studies: "the challenge . . . is not to integrate Latinos to an existing national tradition, but to reshape that tradition in a way that recognizes the continuous life of Latinos within and around it" (211). Whether or not Mexicans would recognize themselves as "Latinos," her point is clear:

American studies scholarship must do more than just study the Latin American immigrant element of U.S. culture; it must broaden its scope of inquiry into those Latino cultures of the United States and also into the Latin American cultures to which they remain connected. And, of course, scholarship that goes beyond the traditional bounds of American studies must dialogue with scholars of the fields into which it expands.[11] Unfortunately, despite some gestures in this direction, American studies has not yet been able to break out of its nationalist habits, and the majority of its border studies projects have tended to confine themselves to the U.S. Southwest.

Mexico's Borderlands in Mexican Studies

Mexicanists, as I have mentioned, who study Mexico's borderlands are typically more likely than Americanists who study the U.S. Southwest to consult scholarship from the other side of the border. For example, volume 4 of *Visión histórica de la frontera norte de México* (2nd edition, 1994), edited by David Piñera Ramírez, routinely cites U.S. sources such as J. Fred Rippy and Oscar Martínez. In fact, as Latin Americanists are aware, it is the very same colonial hierarchies of knowledge that discourage Americanists from seeking out intellectual dialogue with Latin American and Latin Americanist scholars that necessitate cross-border citations for Mexican investigators of the northern borderlands. The citation of U.S. scholarship validates Mexican research in a way that the citation of Mexican scholarship does not for U.S. scholars, particularly those working in American studies.

Nonetheless, border studies among specialists in Mexico has also tended to limit itself in ways that have deflated its importance when viewed from a transamerican perspective. The first problem regarding the study of the Mexican borderlands by Mexicans and Mexicanists has always been what Luis Leal calls "the powerful centrifugal force operating in every aspect of Mexico's life and culture" ("Mexico's Centrifugal Culture" 111). Mexican national culture has tended to construct itself in a centralist fashion, with the cultures of its geographic periphery consistently given less importance than those of Mexico City and the surrounding states of central Mexico.

Tabuenca elaborates on the same theme by asserting that until the last decades of the twentieth century, "Mexico's northern borderlands continued to be seen as 'land of savages' *[tierra de bárbaros]* in national discourse" (106). Mexico's efforts since its independence to establish a profoundly rooted national culture have consistently marginalized its borderlands states. Mexico's periphery's tensions with the center were acute from the beginning, as border states found nineteenth-century national governing structures to favor central states. Border states, separated from the capital by huge distances, mountains, jungles, and difficult terrain, felt isolated from the heart of the nation and developed regional cultures that were in many cases quite distinct from national models. For example, Mexico's Northwest had few cultural links to the Aztecs, to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and other national symbols. And as *fronterizos* rejected mainstream national culture, Mexico City's cultural *caudillos* ignored borderlands culture. Aside from its reputation as a barbaric frontier territory, the north is too close to the United States, and as a result its culture is often seen as contaminated by U.S. influence. And just as Mexican nationalist culture has marginalized its peripheries, Mexican studies has also tended to focus its attention on the national and on the central.

This is not to say that the Mexican academy (along with Mexicanist scholarship in the United States and elsewhere) has not directed any attention to Mexico's northwestern borderlands. However, its efforts in this area have, like those of Americanists with regard to the U.S. borderlands, been surprisingly parochial, particularly when it comes to nineteenth-century projects. The most common treatment is that of the Mexican borderlands as a regional culture (often articulated in state-based terms: e.g., Sonoran history, the literature of Baja California Sur), a small piece of the larger national culture.

For example, Piñera's aforementioned *Visión histórica* presents the northern borderlands' history from 1850 to 1910 in three chapters (each one representing a different temporal period), with each chapter broken down by state, so that each of the six border states (Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Sonora, and Baja California) receives equal and individualized attention.[12] Its focus is on putting together state histories like pieces of a puzzle that together form that of the nation.

Likewise, volume 3 of *Historia general de Sonora* (2nd edition, 1997), coordinated by Juan Antonio Ruibal Corella, structures its content, the history of the northwestern borderlands state of Sonora, largely through national paradigms, following a national periodization (e.g., independence, the war with the United States, the era of *la Reforma*, the French occupation, etc.).

César Sepúlveda, in his *La frontera norte de México: Historia, conflictos 1762–1983* (1983), refers repeatedly in his prologues to his subject of inquiry as "our" borderlands, making clear the Mexican context from which he speaks. Again, while he treats national conflicts with the United States—including the 1846–48 war, the filibuster invasions of the 1850s, the various political conflicts over the border, and so forth, his attention remains focused on the Mexican side. Although of course his bibliography includes many U.S. sources, including books by Herbert Eugene Bolton and David Weber, among many others, his study is not comparative. It is once again a piece of Mexican history, Mexican national history.

A look at Sergio Ortega Noriega's *Un ensayo de historia regional: El noroeste de México 1530–1880* (1993) further demonstrates the dominance in Mexican borderlands historiography of a regional focus that refuses to venture beyond a national context. Here the author addresses his Mexican readers (presumably an audience from central Mexico, where the book was published) "who wish to know the history of the Northwest, a region that occupies a less than modest place in the 'histories of Mexico'" (7). Ortega Noriega's object is to give the borderlands the attention it has previously lacked in the context of national historiography. Interestingly, when confronted with the changes in the borderlands' geography during the course of the vast time period of his study, he chooses to limit himself in utterly national terms. For him, the Northwest is "the cluster of states of Sinaloa, Sonora, Baja California and Baja California Sur, to which I necessarily must add the southern part of the U.S. state of Arizona as well as part of California for the period in which they were territories of New Spain and the Mexican Republic" (11). It is as if suddenly in 1848 and again in 1853 the cultural unity that linked Alta California to Baja California and what has become Arizona to Sonora terminated with the signing of a pair of treaties.

Still, as Ortega Noriega's work makes clear, the study of colonial North America complicates historiography as presented in strictly national terms. A closer look at the field of Mexican colonial historiography sheds additional light on the problem. In accordance with the "centrifugal force" exerted by Mexican national culture, as mentioned by Leal above, Mexican colonial historiography has tended to maintain its focus principally on central Mexico (and secondarily on Yucatán), paying quite limited attention to the northern borderlands. On the other hand, we have seen that as early as the 1920s, Herbert Eugene Bolton called for the incorporation of the history of Spanish colonial North America into a broadly defined American history. Bolton and his followers naturally followed up with a historiography that focused on present-day U.S. territories such as Alta California but also expanded southward, most especially into northwestern Mexico, thereby "invad[ing] the domain of historians of Mexico" (Weber 66). The Mexican historian José Cuello proposed in a 1982 essay "a counterattack" (Weber 68): the reincorporation of the colonial history of what is today northern Mexico into Mexican colonial historiography, but with the caveat that this project be limited at the current national border. "The Borderlands field, he suggested, was a disreputable partner from whom historians of Mexico should seek a divorce. Borderlands history, he argued, is not 'an integral part of the Latin American historical field because the conceptual structure which organizes Borderlands history and selects its methodologies and themes belongs to the field of United States history'" (Weber 68, quoting Cuello). Since it is the U.S. academy (the Bolton school and its descendents) that has provided the conceptual framework for the field, Cuello holds that the intellectual disparities that have shaped national historiographies are so severe as to make cross-border inquiry—even when considering periods prior to the establishment of contemporary national borders—dangerously problematic.

Likewise, Mexicanists working in the United States have been relatively obsessed with the national paradigm in their dealings with the region. A major U.S.–based study, Stuart Voss's *On the Periphery of Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (1982), positions its major focus (the histories of the northwestern states of Sonora and Sinaloa) once again in a national context, mapping out the process by which the northwestern

Mexican periphery "became part of the larger national experience" (xv). Voss concerns himself with the period leading up to the Mexican revolution, examining "how a region on the periphery of Mexico in time became not only an ongoing part of the nation, but eventually its center" (xv). While Voss's interpretation of borderlands history is perhaps more radical than that of some other historians, it once again limits itself to the national paradigm.

A variant to this nationalist vision is the perspective of frontier studies. Just as Frederick Jackson Turner argued that the frontier was a central force in shaping national culture in the United States, a few scholars have investigated the nature and the significance of Mexico's northern frontier. However, David Weber notes that Mexico's frontier has never achieved the prominence in national discourse that the U.S. frontier did with Turner:

> The Anglo-American frontier may or may not have promoted democracy, as Turner argued, but, because Americans widely believe that it did, the idea itself is of considerable importance. In Mexico, however, there has been no counterpart to American idealization of frontier life. No myth about the salubrious impact of the frontier exists on which a Mexican Turner might construct a credible intellectual edifice. (51)

Such a comparative approach is not quite transamerican, as it maintains its focus on the relation of the frontier to tropes of national culture, whether in the United States or Mexico, and is blatantly U.S.–centric in its imposition of a major U.S.–specific discourse onto the study of Mexico.

Nonetheless, it has produced some interesting conclusions, namely, that a cultural transformation did occur toward the end of the nineteenth century in which "[t]he movement of [U.S.] capital into northern Mexico also reshaped northern Mexico from a frontier (a state-facing-nonstate process) into a borderlands, an area (or processal geography, better said) linked to another state (the U.S.) by capital and the cross-boundary movement of people" (Heyman 53). This "frontier to border transition" (Mora-Torres 4) coincides not just with the arrival of U.S. capital to the Mexican north but with "[t]he end of old-style 19th-century *caudillismo*,

the defeat of the Indians, the decline in contraband and banditry" and the integration of northern Mexico "into a centralized political system."[13] This transition interestingly links the Mexican borderlands both to the United States, with which it became increasingly connected in economic terms, and to central Mexico, to which it became better integrated politically. More importantly, by the late nineteenth century, the borderlands came to enjoy improved transportation—most importantly rail lines—which made the region more accessible in both directions. All of the above developments established more solid cultural links in both directions as well. Nonetheless, the vast majority of Mexican studies scholarship on the borderlands has tended to emphasize the national over the transamerican context in its treatment of the period.

Mexico's Borderlands in Latin American Studies

Similar comparative approaches are not uncommon in Latin American studies. In particular, the frontier concept of U.S. history has been adapted for comparative use in Latin American contexts on numerous occasions, with results of varying degrees of interest. Weber summarizes some of the principal conclusions of this trajectory of Latin American studies scholarship, noting first that in Latin America, the physical environments of frontier territories (e.g., the Argentine pampa, the Amazon jungle) tended to differ significantly from those in the United States (40). While this is true for much of Latin America, the climate and topography of northwestern Mexico are in fact quite similar to those of the U.S. Southwest. Second, the particular kinds of relationships between national cultures and unincorporated indigenous groups of frontier zones often differed in Latin America when compared to those seen in the United States, with U.S. policies of annihilation contrasting sharply with Latin America's promotion of assimilation (41)—although, once again, in the Mexican Northwest, while some *mestizaje* and the absorption of certain indigenous groups into the mainstream did occur, regarding other less docile groups (e.g., the Seris, the Yaquis), Mexican frontier policy was often nearly parallel to U.S. policy in the Southwest. Third, Latin Americanists have contrasted Turner's "environmentalism"—that is, the notion that the land, climate, and conditions of the

frontier had a decisive impact on pioneer settlers and, ultimately, on U.S. culture—with the Latin American case, in which the impact of frontiersmen and the culture they brought with them to the frontier was a transformative factor in the shaping of frontier culture (and not vice versa) (42). Once again, in the particular case of the Mexican borderlands, the difference is not so obvious. While it is clear that Mexico's frontier did not produce the same kind of cultural metaphors that the U.S. frontier did, the Mexican historian Silvio Zavala's conclusion that "the insecurity of life in the Mexican north and the instability of a docile Indian labor force 'stamped the character of the northern people with a certain temper and energy'" (quoted in Weber 44) suggests some clear parallels as well.

This is not to say that Latin Americanists are comfortable with any "frontier hypothesis," or even with the notion of frontier as a major node of inquiry. Recall that "frontier" is usually understood as a contact zone where the edges of civilization (settlement) and barbarism (unconquered wilderness) overlap. Regarding pre-twentieth-century Latin America, as David Weber and Jane Rausch point out:

> Geographic areas may have a low man-land ratio, but they are rarely "unsettled," and areas that urbanites see as "wilderness" have nearly always contained their own distinctive indigenous civilizations. Moreover, native societies usually have regarded themselves as at the center rather than on the frontier. As used by the invading culture, the word *frontier* has had a decidedly ideological quality. (xiii)

For this and other reasons mentioned above, the frontier paradigm has not had a central presence in Latin Americanist scholarship on the borderlands.

What is seen clearly in these more comparative studies that are approached from a broadly Latin American perspective is a tendency to gloss over or utterly overlook the specificity of the case of northern Mexico. After all, unlike the cases of Patagonia, the Amazon jungle, or the Peruvian Andes, Mexico's northern frontier directly abuts the United States. It follows then that its relationship with the United States would be different from that of other parts of Latin America with the North American behemoth, and that U.S. culture, particularly

U.S. southwestern borderlands culture, would play a greater role in its constitution and evolution. Therefore, comparative Latin American frontier studies have not been helpful in illuminating the specific case of Mexico's Northwest.

Still, to the extent that many such studies do at least mention northern Mexico, if only as an exception to predominant patterns common to other parts of Latin America, they are more helpful than what seems to be the latest trend in Latin Americanist border studies. Latin American studies, despite its historical formation as a cold war–era area studies discipline defined in strictly national and geographic terms, has striven in recent years to adapt itself to a changing world in which immigration to the United States from Latin America has produced significant cultural changes to mainstream U.S. culture. In other words, Latin American studies has branched out into Latino studies, overlapping in many cases with the same style expansion as that seen in American studies.

This interdisciplinary overlap has been productive in many ways. It has begun to pressure disciplinary boundaries of both American studies and Latin American studies and to point to the importance of bilingualism.[14] However, as Latin American studies follows Latin American immigrant communities in their northward trajectory, the field must be careful not to duplicate problematic hierarchies of knowledge that imbue the field of American studies. It is problematic but at least understandable that the border studies produced and read by Americanists and scholars of Chicano studies may limit itself too rigidly to questions of interest north of the border without considering or consulting the borderlands of northern Mexico. However, when the same mistake is repeated by Latin Americanists, it is alarming.

In 1984, Richard Griswold del Castillo wrote a review article for the *Latin American Research Review* titled "New Perspectives on the Mexican and American Borderlands," in which he reviewed five recent books, three published in the United States, and two in Mexico. Despite the title's suggestion that the works would address both "the Mexican and American borderland," all five books dealt exclusively with "the American southwest" or the cultures "north of the Río Bravo." While Griswold judges the texts in question to be "synthetic" as they "integrate both American and Mexican perspectives" (200), their focus is exclusively upon the populations and cultures of the U.S. Southwest.

In 2002, Benjamin Johnson, in the same journal, published the review essay "Engendering Nation and Race in the Borderlands," again reviewing a cluster of recently published books treating the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, which Johnson defines as "the region on either side of the border that now divides the United States and Mexico" (259). Once again, all six texts addressed the Mexican American populations of the United States to the exclusion of those of the Mexican side of the border. Four of the texts focused on gender issues in specific U.S. Southwestern states including New Mexico, Arizona, and California; the other two texts were novels written by the *Tejana* Jovita González, both set in southern Texas. This time all six books were published in the United States.

It is unlikely that either of these critics set out to exclude texts on northern Mexico from his survey of border studies scholarship; it is more probable that each reviewed the most recently published and well-received texts that were available within the particular thematic limits implied by their chosen topic. However, it is noteworthy that neither critic found it strange that the particular collection of books he ultimately did review focused exclusively on one side of the border. Whether these omissions reflect publication patterns, the journal in question's relationships with Mexican publishers, or the possibility that the Mexican borderlands are simply not very interesting to many Latin Americanists cannot be ascertained—although the absence of any mention of the influential border studies scholarship of the prolific *tijuanense* José Manuel Valenzuela Arce, for example, is remarkable. The prominence of scholarship on the U.S. Southwest at the expense of scholarship on the Mexican borderlands within the context of Latin American studies is lamentable.

An interesting example of a Latin Americanist branching out beyond the disciplinary and geopolitical confines of his field is the recent work of the U.S.–based Argentine cultural studies scholar Walter Mignolo. His *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (2000) proposes a revision of knowledge production that decenters the mainstream academy of western Europe and the United

States, refocusing attention on thinkers from the borderlands. Prototypical is the Chicana intellectual and poet Gloria Anzaldúa, who for Mignolo complements mainstream academic knowledge with that produced by people like her, intellectuals from subaltern cultures (5–6). Mignolo introduces the term "border gnosis" to refer to the "hidden" philosophies and epistemologies of traditional cultures that intellectuals from such communities bring into mainstream academic discourse (9–11). He writes:

> Border gnosis as knowledge from a subaltern perspective is knowledge conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system, and border gnoseology as a discourse about colonial knowledge is conceived at the conflictive intersection of the knowledge produced from the perspective of modern colonialisms (rhetoric, philosophy, science) and knowledge produced from the perspective of colonial modernities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas/Caribbean. (11)

Mignolo's study obviously goes well beyond the context of the U.S.–Mexico borderlands or even his own field of Latin American studies.

However, to the extent that the book is a Latin Americanist's theorization of the hybrid thinking of the borderlands between countries like the United States and Mexico, and that the Chicana Anzaldúa is his much-lauded intellectual role model from that region, it is interesting to observe once again that the U.S.–Mexico borderlands is reduced to the U.S. Southwest, and that the Chicana who published on the U.S. side, taught at U.S. universities, and wrote more in English than in Spanish is featured, while no Mexican borderlands figure from the Mexican side who writes principally in Spanish or specializes in the culture and history of the Mexican borderlands appears. Anzaldúa, we will recall, has been criticized for her reductive representation of Mexico. Writes the Mexican borderlands critic Socorro Tabuenca, referring to Anzaldúa's seminal *Borderlands/La Frontera:*

> In Anzaldúa's text, despite the crossing of borders and different worlds . . . , the geographical border and the relations between Mexico and the United States are essentialized. U.S. whites are presented as "them" and minorities as "us" . . . ; between these two worlds, a third country arises, "a border culture" . . . But this third country . . . is also a metaphoric culture narrated from the first world. (89)

Mignolo's idealization of the widely admired Anzaldúa serves to reinforce the hierarchies of knowledge that his book aims to assail. Chicano studies, largely accepted into the U.S. university system in the fields of both American studies and Latin American studies, may remain a minority discourse in the United States, but it plainly outranks Mexican border studies.

Some of the issues that have come up in the global context of Latin American studies resound emphatically for U.S.–Mexico border studies. Mignolo writes of the "asymmetry of language" to reflect not only the subordinate position of languages like Spanish in relation to English but the relative hierarchies of languages in general within the context of academic discourse (231). Indigenous languages, of course, which in many cases have relatively few speakers, carry very little prestige and are not capable of reaching a significant audience, particularly when compared with Spanish, the dominant language throughout much of Latin America. Yet despite the large number of Spanish speakers in the Americas, its academic status (both globally and oftentimes even within Latin America itself) is inferior to that of English.

These issues of academic power have plagued the field of Latin American studies since its rise in the United States during the cold war. The Chile-based cultural critic Nelly Richard discusses a major product of U.S.–based area studies: "Latin Americanism," a concept analogous to the "orientalism" studied by Edward Said. Richard objects to the "academic distribution of disciplinary knowledges that administer and certify the value and meaning of Latin American cultural practices" (3). She is one of several Latin America–based intellectuals who "have sharpened their critical knives on what they regard as a major Latin Americanist sellout of Latin America into the global market taking place primarily, if not exclusively, through the U.S. academy" (Moreiras 240). If Latin American studies has contended with issues of the greater power and prestige of U.S. publications, work carried out in English, and U.S.–based conferences, when the subject becomes the borderlands, such issues become more pronounced. Those who dominate are not only U.S.–based scholars who publish in English but scholars whose work focuses on U.S. culture, albeit a peripheral aspect of U.S. culture: the Mexican American Southwest.