

Millennial Anxieties:
Borders, Violence
and the Struggle for Chicana/o Subjectivity

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The events of 1836 brought forth charges of Mexican depravity and violence, a theme which became pervasive once Anglos made closer contact with the state's Hispanic population following the war. In the crisis of the moment, firebrands spoke alarmingly of savage, degenerate, half-civilized, and barbarous Mexicans committing massacres and atrocities at Goliad and the Alamo.

—Arnoldo de León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (1983)

We were thrown out of just about everywhere, but what really made me feel bad was when we tried to go into a restaurant or a restroom downtown, and we were told, 'No you can't use it.' The police would always come and say, 'This is a public place, you have to get out, you're not allowed here.'

—Maria Elena Lucas, *Forged Under the Sun/ Forjada Bajo el Sol* (1993)

Chicana/o border studies, devoted to understanding the complex dialectics of racialized, subaltern, feminist and diasporic identities and the aesthetic politics of hybrid *mestiza/o* cultural production, is at the vanguard of historical, anthropological, literary, cultural, artistic and theoretical inquiry.¹ This essay is an invitation to situate the diverse practices of critical US/Mexican borderland inquiry in the historical moment of 1998-1999. We hang at the precipice of the next millennium with all of the promises and anxieties that it produces. For our inquiry, one of the most important of these anxieties is the unkept promise that ensued from the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo over 150 years ago. This treaty signed at the end of the US/Mexican war resulted in the formation of the US/Mexico border, the forced purchase of Northern México for 15 million dollars (California, New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Nevada,

Utah and parts of Colorado, Oklahoma and Kansas) as well as the supposed protection of property and civil, cultural and religious rights of Chicanos and Mexicana/o peoples.² Disturbed and outraged by the continued prevalence of historical patterns of criminalization, marginalization, dispossession, civil rights violations and torture in Chicana/o and other subaltern communities, my essay seeks to contribute to the field of critical border studies by exploring the relationship between discourses of otherization crystallized by the US/México border (racial, sexual, ideological) and state-enforced acts of violence (INS, paramilitary and police) on the bodies of Mexicana/o and Latina/o immigrants and Chicana/o youth.

“Shifting Borders, Free Trade, and Frontier Narratives: US, Canada, and México, American Literary History” (1994) by Pamela Maria Smorkaloff summarizes the movement of critical border studies as it responds to specific geo-political locations. Smorkaloff considers the ways in which theorists, writers, and performance artists map transfrontier social space challenging monologic socio-political forces that maintain national borders: “Transfrontier writers and theorists are developing a kind of syncretism of the first and third worlds in their writing that captures not only the complex reality of the border zone, but also a more profound understanding of the contemporary US and the Latin America living within” (97).

In similar terms, *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (1991) by D. Emily Hicks examines the dialectics of transfrontier identity and border writing. Hicks uses the concept of border crossings as a metaphor and a tool to analyze the heterogeneity of identity in Latin American writing. Even though the bulk of the text focuses on two major Argentinean writers, Julio Cortázar and Luisa Valenzuela, Hicks begins the study by discussing the US/México border region, and concludes it by returning to Chicano and Mexicano writing in the US/México border regions.

Hicks argues that border writing “emphasizes the differences in reference codes between two or more cultures” (xxv) expressing the “bilingual, bi-cultural, bi-conceptual reality” of border crossers. However, Hicks is emphatic in positing that border writing is about crossing cultural borders and not physical borders. This leads to her disturbing characterization of the US/México border as a theater of “metaphors” where the following “actors”: *pollos* (undocumented border crossers), *la migra* (INS) and *coyotes* (contractors who bring undocumented people over the border) act their daily “dramas.” Hicks creates a universalizing model that

moves beyond concrete historical understandings of subaltern Latina/o “border-crossers” as “real people” responding to “real” geo-political social realities and understands their experiences as a type of carnivalesque and post-modern theater. In doing so, Hicks deracinates the individuality of people—their/our specific histories, and family and community ties—who negotiate the often violent border crossing for such reasons as poverty, hunger, political persecution, to reunite with loved ones, or a simple curiosity to see life *al otro lado* (the other side).³

The foundational anthology, *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, and Ideology* (1991), edited by Hector Calderón and José David Saldívar, grounds the discussion of transfrontier ideology to a concrete geopolitical zone. This anthology challenges the exclusionary practices of the American literary academy and the formation of the canon by recovering “neglected authors and texts” in the “Southwest and the American West.” The work also provides a forum for diverse theoretical perspectives: “Chicano/a theory and theorists in our global borderlands: from ethnographic to post-modernist, Marxist to feminist” (6). What renders the anthology even more significant to the growth of critical border studies is the argument by the critics that Chicano theoretical analyses can move from a regional understanding of relations of power to a global one without denying the historical specificities of each geopolitical locale.

In an earlier essay, “Limits of Cultural Studies” (1990), Saldívar articulates the cultural and border studies imperative in more detail, arguing that cultural studies must be both regional and global: “Finally, cultural studies, a border zone of conjunctures, must aspire to be regionally focused, and broadly comparative, a form of living and of travel in our global borderlands” (264). In this 1990 essay, Saldívar critiques both the subjectifying forces which inferiorize and homogenize non-Western peoples in the social relations of power and how scholarly practices replicate these forces. Saldívar shares in the British Cultural Studies understanding of culture as a dynamic and heterogeneous site where tensions of domination and resistance compete, linking these principles to forge a greater understanding of borders, resistance, and *mestizaje*. By studying the “subordinate and dominant cultures like public schoolchildren in Great Britain or low riders and *cholos* in East Los Angeles,” Saldívar argues that Cultural Studies is committed to “transforming any social order which exploits people on the grounds of race, class, and gender.” Cultural Studies and Border Theory challenge “the authority of canon theory and emergent practice” and the relations of power which sustain this authority (252).

After setting up his critique of monologic tendencies in anthropological practices, Saldívar surveys several key border writers, “native informants” Rolando Hinojosa, Gloria Anzaldúa, Guillermo Gómez Peña, and Renato Rosaldo. Saldívar argues that these writers offer counter-narratives to the master narratives of nations that attempt to normalize identity and totalize cultural heterogeneity. Saldívar summarizes their writings as “cultural work” that “challenges the authority and even the future identity of monocultural America” (264).

Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies (1997) by José Saldívar, a dazzling and impressive study of border writers, artists, musicians, theorists and scholars, dramatically builds on this critique of the master-narratives that author the hegemonization of “monocultural America.” Saldívar argues that

U.S. Mexico border writers and activist intellectuals have begun the work of exploring the terrains of border crossing and diaspora amid the debris of what El Vez calls our “national scar” of manifest destiny and the cultures of the U.S. imperialism.... The history of migration, forced dispersal in the Américas as represented in the vernacular border cultures, challenges us to delve into the specific calculus of the U.S.-Mexico border crossing condition. (197)

In similar terms “Beasts and Jagged Strokes of Color: The Poetics of Hybridization on the US Mexican Border,” by literary scholar and Chicano poet, Alfred Arteaga (1994) addresses the multi-dimensional intersection of real and discursive forces along the US/México border—the border patrol and Tex-Mex Caló, for example—by discussing the formation of the Chicana/o subject in relation to tensions produced by the border. With reference to Chicano poet Juan Felipe Herrera’s “Literary Asylums,” a heteroglossia of voices subjectified by and resistant to competing discourses of the nation-state, Arteaga states:

“Literary Asylums” and other Chicano poems play in a poetics of hybridization that calls to mind the quotidian cultural politics of hybridization in the material space of the frontier. What is at play is the formation of a Chicano subject coming to be amid the competing discourses of nation. (1)

Arteaga continues his discussion of Chicano poetics of hybridization or dialogic poetics by grounding the discussion on the material border.

Arteaga considers the purpose of the border as intended by the nations at stake—US and México:

Consider the border: in the imagining of nation, it is the infinitely thin line that truly differentiates the US from México. The absolute certainty of its discrimination instills confidence in national definition, for it clearly marks the unequivocal edge of the nation. Its perceived thinness and keenness of edge are necessary for the predication of national subjectivity, which defines itself as occurring inside its border and not occurring outside. (2)

Arteaga observes how “[t]he thin borderline cleaves two national narratives, two national monologues of ideal and finalized selves” (2). Central to Arteaga’s argument is the tension between the monologic tendencies of national narrative and the dialogic, interlingual, and hybridizing impulses of Chicana/o subjects and their literary expression. Arteaga locates the border zone as a site that is lived and expressed by those marginalized by nationalizing forces and who reside in the physical/discursive interstices and margins generated by the border.

The border for Arteaga is a site of power that selectively privileges and marginalizes, reinforcing social hierarchies along axes of race, class, nationality, and sexuality. He compares the experience of elite Mexican bourgeois Octavio Paz—who knows himself to be fully Mexican when crossing the border, a line that reinforces his imagined singular self—with that of Chicana-Tejana lesbian theorist and writer, Gloria Anzaldúa, who argues that “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. The prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants” (5).⁴

However, to consider the experience of Mexican immigrants crossing the border from the South, I assert a series of propositions that add to Arteaga’s discussion of the multi-valent nature of the US/México border. At the outset, I need to clarify that these assertions on the effects of the border for Mexicans traveling North reflect the socio-economic conditions of peoples who do not enjoy the privilege of such national subjects as Paz and other bourgeois elite who can demonstrate to the Visa-granting embassy in México City, Ciudad Juárez or Tijuana, that they have sufficient economic ties to México—bank accounts, businesses, and high-status occupations. As border performance artist and poet Gerardo Navarro states in his reference to the “apartheid” of the border, the torti-

lla-curtain operates like “a valve that is closed or opened by the invisible hands of the market in accord with the fluctuations in Wall Street and in the global market” (1994, 4). My propositions are as follows:

1. The border serves as a “free zone” for US citizens and US corporations (US border crossers). The free-zone applies to week-end tourists crowding the bars, drinking cheap beers, and seeking male and female prostitutes; to US companies exploiting “cheap” labor and lax environmental regulation controls; to name a few.⁵

2. Contrary to the free-zone where all Euroamerican taboos drop, the border is also a free-zone of violence, a barrier to those trying to cross from the South—as evidenced by the Border Patrol, week-end vigilantism, bandits, and *coyotes* who after collecting their fees rob, rape, and denounce border crossers.

3. Even though the border is selectively open to those whose class positions confirm their tourist and student status, it forces a discourse of inferiorization onto Mexicans and other Latinos, especially those whose class position, ethnicity, and skin color emerges from the *campesina/o* and urban proletariat groups.

4. Finally, once crossed, the border is infinitely elastic and can serve as a barrier and zone of violence for the Mexican or Latino who is confronted by racist and gendered obstacles—material and discursive—anywhere s/he goes in the United States. This means that the immigrant continually faces crossing the border even if s/he is in Chicago (or wherever in the United States)—a continual shifting from margin to margin.

In no way do these propositions give breadth to the infinite variety of experiences and struggles for Mexicans and other Latin-American immigrants moving across and through this infinitely elastic border to the United States. The immediate questions that the border poses are: How can we chart the multiple vectors of forced liminalities produced by the US/México border? Is it enough to say that, “No matter where a Mexican travels or lives in the United States, he or she always inhabits an economic, racial and discursive status that is automatically secondary and perpetually liminal?”⁶

In *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* (1992), an important study of contemporary Mexican immigration, Leo R. Chávez understands liminality as a state of living in the shadows. Chávez illustrates the liminality in concrete terms with the following description of a family trying to visit Disneyland from San Diego: Undocumented immigrants frequently told me that because of their illegal status they were not free to enjoy life, often citing as an example the fact that they

were unable to take their children to Disneyland because of the immigration checkpoint at San Clemente” (14).

On February 1, 1997 the Rocky Mountain Regional conference of the National Association of Chicana/o Studies took place in downtown Phoenix, Arizona. The event was an inspirational gathering of scholars from a wide variety of disciplines, Chicana/o Studies Department Chairs, community leaders and activists, cultural workers and students dedicated to promoting the interdisciplinary and multi-faceted field of Chicana/o studies, as well as re-igniting further consciousness regarding the marginalized and uneven status of the Chicana/o communities. My participation in this rich *encuentro* of scholarly and political knowledge made me question further the roles of critics and scholars dedicated to Chicana/o Studies as we near the end of the millennium.

Specifically, I balance the wonderful gains that the field of Chicana/o studies has witnessed—a proliferation of interdisciplinary scholarship, an increased focus on issues of gender and sexuality, the recent establishment of the Chicana/o Studies Department at Arizona State University, an increased enrollment of Chicana/o students at all levels, and further support for Chicana/o graduate students—with the realization and recognition that there are still negative constants facing the Chicana/o community.⁷ Examples of these constants are: 1) continued economic marginalization, 2) sub-standard housing, schooling, and general public services, 3) extremely high incarceration rates,⁸ and 4) an increase in the sophistication and deployment of violence especially towards Chicana/o youth and Mexicana/o immigrants, including those residents and citizens of Mexican descent unfortunate enough to get caught in immigration or *migra* sweeps. Regarding Chicana/o youth, their style of dress, music and art is categorically demonized and criminalized by the dominant culture thus continuing hegemonic patterns of demonization and the concomitant violation of youth seen most dramatically during the “Zoot Suit Riots” (1940s), the repression of Chicana/o youth believed to be associated with the Brown Berets (1970s), and of the youth suspected of being involved in gangs (1940s-present).⁹

Also, there is a continuing increase in the sophistication of methods of surveillance, weaponry, capture and detainment in the Chicana/o communities by such state and federal agencies as the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and state and county police and sheriffs. Growing technological sophistication coupled with a continuance of brute force and strategies of deception are evidenced by the use of infrared technologies, video surveillance, impenetrable bullet proof vests, assault

rifles, and laser tracking devices, as well as such vulgar ruses as informing alleged “illegals” that they need to show up to a warehouse to claim their televisions and cars—prizes that they supposedly won by lottery—only to be captured, detained and deported.¹⁰

I ask these unsettling questions: what does it mean for me to write as a Chicano in the final years of the millennium, 506 years after the full-scale invasion of the Américas—the usurpation of lands, the wholesale rape and slaughter of indigenous peoples, the forced importation and brutal enslavement of African peoples; and the institutionalized criminalization and marginalization of the Chicana/o community, etc.? What is my responsibility to the past, to the present, and to the future, and to the practice of representation? What does it mean for me to enter into the practice of methodologies that empower peoples who have not only been physically colonized—the “other,” the “marginal,” the “subaltern”—but also, intellectually colonized by apparatuses of representation that reify their status as savage with all of the connotations of barbarism, inferiority, and childlike innocence that accompany such an identification?¹¹

We celebrate the epistemological shifts that feminist, multi-ethnic, postmodernist and post-colonial discourse provides us scholars, writers, activists, and theorists.¹² We rally together with freedom to discuss and analyze the social formations of the subject, and the hybridity of forces that impinge upon and constitute the subject.¹³ The epistemological shifts in the politics and practice of ethnography, literary criticism, and Cultural Studies free us up to discuss the micro and macro politics of how subjects are formed, positioned and represented in both social and discursive economies. We challenge each other to implement interdisciplinary methods that embrace the heterogeneous nature of social reality.

As critics, writers, and theorists of communities and histories that are our own, we, as insiders and outsiders, call for the questioning of borders and an end to neocolonialism, to racism, to sexism, to homophobia as well as to the devastation of ecosystems through agribusiness mining and the timber industry. At the same time, however, in even the seconds, minutes, hours, and days that I write and think about this project and about ways to discuss subaltern peoples in liberating terms, funds are being transferred electronically. The funds pass into the “borderless” global free-trade market, legalized by such international accords as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); yet travel for subaltern peoples—Mexicanos and other Latinos, for example—is highly restricted by mili-

taristic border patrol agents. If the travelers and refugees cannot prove sufficient economic ties to their home country, they have to run like *pollos* (a slang term which literally means “chickens” and refers to border-crossers)—hungry, stressed, and avoiding robbery, assaults, rape by a variety of predatory groups, and human rights abuses by The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)—to cross the border into *el Norte*, or *el otro lado* (the other side) where they will live in fear of deportation, racial harassment, and suffer extreme exploitation. Put simply, money travels; people can't.¹⁴ For example, consider the following depiction of the potential hazards of crossing the US/México border (referred by many as the Tortilla Curtain) in *Across The Wire/Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border* (1993) by Luis Alberto Urrea:

Now say that you are lucky enough to evade all these dangers on your journey. Hazards still await you and your family. You might meet white racists, complimenting themselves with the tag 'Aryan.' They 'patrol' the scrub in combat gear, carrying high-powered flashlights, rifles, and bats.... And of course there is the Border Patrol (*la migra*). (17)

Labor intensive sweat factories, *maquiladoras*, are built in the “free-trade zones” of México, Central America and Southeast Asia to take advantage of extreme inequities in global pay scales. Mexican, Salvadoran, and Filipino women and children are hired not only because they are the most exploitable in local economies, but also, because they are perceived to have nimble fingers and rapid hand-eye coordination. Thankful to have some job in a crippling economic crisis, they race to meet their production quotas in fourteen hour days, with two strictly enforced bathroom breaks of ten minutes each, so that US, Arabic, Japanese, and European consumers, as well as the bourgeois consumers of each producing country, can buy Gap clothes and Nike shoes at ever greater discounts, and with greater variety of styles.¹⁵

In trying to understand the larger patterns of race, class, and gender oppression, as well as movements of capital on the global stage that inform a given historical moment and contextualize a given literary, cultural and social text, the importance of specific peoples and individuals affected by these plays of power is easily overlooked. To do this, discourses and movements of oppression and resistance need to be analyzed at the level of the body and person-hood to illustrate how they have “real” consequences for “real” people. I say this aware that statements on the “real,” the “individual,” and the “person” could imply that I am re-ca-

pitulating notions of a fixed, stable autonomous subject—a concrete, knowable, a priori subject—so idealized by Western metaphysics. To do this, would disregard or repress what post-structural, post-colonial, and radical feminist thought has taught us regarding the social construction of subjects.¹⁶

However, I ask: How is the diverse play of heterogeneous discourses that constitute human subjectivity (re)-understood when subjects are shot at, chased, detained, raped and incarcerated because they are of a certain ethnic group, sexuality, and gender; or with respect to Mayan, Kenyan, and Mexican workers, for example, demanding some kind of protection for their labor, or in the case of Chicana/o youth walking home from school and getting caught in an INS sweep? Perhaps, the dialectic that drives discursive practices of inferiorization and materialist practices of repression is precisely that: the “play” of human subjectivity is handcuffed, imprisoned, deported, and violated in acts of containment and repression by monologues of dominance and denial which state and enforce: “You are Other ... You are Alien ... You are Messican ... You have no rights ... You are unnatural ... You are a beast.” In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) Gloria Anzaldúa eloquently speaks to the violent otherization of Chicana/os and other peoples marginal to the dominant Euroamerican culture:

Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they’re Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, gassed, shot. The only “legitimate” inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tensions grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger. (4)

A dramatic example of how anti-Mexican immigrant discourses of otherization and de-humanization translate into acts of State-enforced physical violence is the brutal April 2, 1996 Riverside county sheriff beatings of Mexican immigrants, coined by many as “another Rodney King beating” because of the extreme and brutal nature of the physical batterings. To re-count the dramatic footage, a truck full of Mexicanas/os-Latinas/os, alleged “undocumented” subjects is being vigorously pursued by first, Border Patrol agents, and then Riverside county sheriffs through “parts of Riverside, San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties before ending on Pomona Freeway about 20 miles east of Los Angeles.” (*CNN Interactive*,

web post 11:05 a.m., April 2, 1996). The truck is so old and worn that it literally starts de-constructing. At the height of the pursuit, pieces of the fenders and siding start to fly off onto the freeway; the truck motor is shaking and the suspension is pushed to its ultimate limits. A large group of people grip what is left of the shell on the back. After the truck veers to the side, those who can escape flee into the nearby brush; but the situation is much different for those left in the cab. Video footage clearly shows how the sheriff swings his baton at least six times with full force on a male driver who offers absolutely no resistance, and more dramatically, both sheriffs repeatedly strike a woman on the passenger seat with their batons, even though Alicia Sotero-Vasquez offers no physical resistance and literally goes limp as a rag doll. One of the sheriff's viciously "pull[ed] her to the ground by the hair" (CNN 1996). Please consider the following image which illustrates the absolute unambiguity in the violation of the civil and human rights of these suspected "illegals," and begs the the following question: Does having the status of "illegal alien" ascribed to you because of your physical and linguistic characteristics, and appearance legalize violence against your person and community?¹⁷



(COURTESY KOBI FILE)

I ask: will this be the image, which speaks so directly to the impunity with which State enforced violence occurs and which nakedly reflects the brutality of US and Mexican immigrant relations, that propels us into the next century?¹⁸

In the case of police, para-military, and INS bullets shooting "Others," (as well as fatal violence from other coercive agents of the dominant culture such as neo-nazi vigilante groups or thugs hired by *finca* owners),

the historicity and vitality of sub-altern subjects are stopped and driven into annihilation by the monologism of the State. Persons, whose bodies are violated and nullified—and who are characterized in such abject terms as “greaser,” the “drunken Indian,” the “Black gang-banger,” “Jap stealer of jobs” or “Castro-loving indio”—are remembered only in the collective consciousness of the person’s family and community. The impunity with which these deaths and violence occur only reinforces the subaltern and abjected status of these subjects and communities.

Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1982) by the prolific psychoanalytic feminist scholar, Julia Kristeva, argues that abjection, the most extreme form of otherization, is the process that expulses, then mutilates, defiles, desecrates anything that is deemed alien and opposed to the “I” of the Self: “Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you” (4). To illustrate the politics of abjection further, Kristeva reflects on her visit to the halls of the Auschwitz museum where she observes “a heap of children’s shoes” and “dolls” under a “Christmas tree” (4). Kristeva eloquently observes that: “The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which, in any case kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things” (4).

Bodies that are marked as “Other” because of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and political affiliations become sites where power brands subjects turning them into social abjects: invisible, subversive, (un-...), libidinal and violent, and in the case of slavery, branded objects to be bartered, sold and literally worked to death. An example in classic American literature comes to mind—Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, where the letter “A,” cut from crimson cloth, “brands” Hester Prynne, marking her body as Other for transgressing the sexual taboos and cultural mores of puritan society. Another instance where power literally brands subjects—turning them into social abjects—is the yellow cloth stars and serial numbers worn by and engraved on the arms of Jewish peoples in Germany and Europe during World War II. These violently engraved “signs” of otherization and abjection compare to the literal hot-iron branding of the skin of African and indigenous slaves in the Americas (and other areas of colonial conquest) that marked their bodies not only as Others, but also as property or commodities of the colonial overlords.¹⁹

The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other (1984) by Bulgarian linguist and critic Tzvetan Todorov, is a landmark study of the

ideological justifications and methods of the conquest of the Américas which resulted in the horrific genocide of over 90% of the indigenous populations: Over 70 million died between 1500 and 1650 due to direct murder and warfare, slavery and work conditions, and the “microbe shock” of diseases unknown in the Américas, smallpox, syphilis and cholera (133-137). Todorov recalls Vasco de Quiroga’s description of the slave traffic and the practice of branding indigenous peoples by first, the royal seal of Spain, and then the individual brands of the Spanish *encomenderos* or royally appointed overlords in the “New World” :

During the first years of the after the conquest, the slave traffic flourished, and slaves often changed master. ‘They are marked with brands on the face and in their flesh are imprinted the initials of the names of those who are successfully their owners; they pass from hand to hand, and some have three or four names, so that the faces of these men who were created in God’s image have been, by our sins, transformed into paper.’ (137)

Todorov analyzes further the physical consequences of enslavement and observes the horrific effects of the Spanish abjection and desecration the indigenous Other to a literal “trunk” of “flesh” :

Enslavement, in this sense of the word, reduces the other to the status of an object, which is especially manifested in conduct that treats the Indians as less than men: their flesh is used to feed the surviving Indians or even the dogs, they are killed in order to be boiled for grease ... all their extremities are cut off, nose, hands, breasts, tongue, sexual organs, thereby transforming them into shapeless trunks. (175)

Nez Perce historian and cultural studies critic Patricia Penn Hilden calls the Anglo-centric cultural hegemony, among others imposed by the colonizing forces in the Américas, the “overculture” or the *überculture* (1997). This term resonates directly with the fascist culture of dominance in war-time Germany. I can’t help but recall that at the height of the Nazi genocide of Jewish, Gays, and Romanian Gypsies, officers of the Third Reich loved to show off the lamps made from stretched Jewish skin.²⁰ In trying to understand how Euroamerican, Spanish, and even Mexican *übercultures* (as with all nation-states) operate in multidimensional ways—power circulates and disperses on multiple fronts, layers and vectors—I argue that the trajectories of an overculture end only to

then regenerate themselves in the complete abjection and desecration of the Other. To illustrate this process of abjection, desecration and regeneration in the history of the US/México borderlands one needs only to examine the consequences of figures who were perceived as threats to the racial and gender coded social order of the United States. For example, in the case of the renowned social bandit of the 1850 California Gold Rush, Joaquín Murieta, who after being persecuted, ambushed, and executed, was decapitated, his head was pickled and put on a traveling display; or the case of the shrunken head of Mexican Revolutionary leader Pancho Villa, a prized collectors item among prominent Western capitalists.²¹ Consider the following reprint of an 1853 poster advertising the traveling exhibition of the “The Head of the Renowned Bandit! Joaquin!”²²

**WILL BE
EXHIBITED
FOR ONE DAY ONLY!
AT THE STOCKTON HOUSE!
THE HEAD
Of the renowned Bandit!
JOAQUIN!
BAND OF THREE FINGERED JACK!**

According to the *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, The Celebrated California Bandit* (1854) by Yellow Bird (or John Rollin Ridge, a Cherokee-Anglo crossblood) Captain Love, the commissioned California Ranger who captured Joaquín Murieta, was paid much more than the “sum of one thousand dollars,” the reward money posted for the capture of the “bandit, dead or alive” by the Governor of California: “And subsequently, on the fifteenth day of May 1854, the Legislature of California, considering that his truly valuable services in ridding the country of so great a terror—were not sufficiently rewarded, passed an act granting him an additional sum of five thousand dollars” (158).

In addition, perhaps the starkest example of legalized vigilante violence in the California Gold Rush years aimed at the Mexicana/o com-

munity in general, and women in specific, is the barbaric lynching of Josefa Vasquez, a pregnant women from Sonora, México. In 1851, Josefa, popularly known as *Juanita de Downieville* in an attempt to defend herself against vile verbal abuse and rape in her own home stabs and kills Fred Cannon, a well liked Anglo-American miner. By 4:00 p.m. that afternoon where a Kangaroo trial “proved” that Juanita was an “antisocial prostitute” and Cannon was a “peaceful” and “honest” man, Josefa was lynched. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (1988) by Rodolfo Acuña, a Chicano historian evokes this tragic and brutal moment as follows:

Senator John B. Weller was in town but he did nothing to stop the hanging. Weller was an ambitious politician who was later to become governor, and one voteless Mexican made no difference. Over 2000 men lined the river to watch Josefa hang at the bridge. After this, lynching became commonplace and Mexicans came to know Anglo-American democracy as ‘*Linchocracia*.’ (119)

I mentioned the conquest of the Américas, the violent after-math of the US/México war for the Mexicana/o community in the United States, as well as the violence of State repression, and the violence of hyperexploitation in order to ground the discussion of identity in the “real” world of contemporary social relations where the lives of the “Others,” I argue,—Chicanas/os, Latina/os, Mayan women, Salvadoran campesinas, Turkish, Tunisians, Asians, gays and lesbians, to name a few—still have little meaning within cultures of dominance (the übercultures). In the case of the Américas, the torture of individuals—Inquisitions of the late Twentieth Century—is now called interrogation or intelligence gathering. To induce a confession, CIA-refined science uses techniques of pain dating back to the Spanish Inquisition, developed by the infamous sixteenth century inquisitor Juan de Torquemada, as well as the most advanced surgical, electrical and video technologies. The *modus operandi* are electrocutions and incisions, which are extremely painful but show little on the skin, as well as violent beatings, among other things. In addition to these practices, individuals are subjected to audio-visual recreations or simulations of loved ones and comrades being tortured or confessing to their crimes against the state with the goal of inducing and intimidating the insurgent “subjects” into admitting to whichever crime/s the state has decided they committed. These “scientific” techniques, along with other methods of repression, are taught by US military advi-

sors to the members of a given military regime who are fighting, in the words of both groups, “the communist terrorists” (e.g., El Salvador, Nicaragua, or Guatemala), or they are taught in a more systematic way to officers of a given military regime in Latin America “lucky” enough to attend the “School of the Americas” whose campus is at Fort Benning, Georgia.²³ The scrivener’s pen of the Inquisition is now replaced by ready-to-sign type-written forms and the video cameras that film the subject’s “confession.” These victims of torture are dressed in clean shirts and made-up with cake powder to cover bruises and swollen faces.²⁴ Video tapes of torture are prized commodities on the underground market that circulates “snuff-films,” child-pornography, and materials about bestiality and necrophilia.

In cases of imperial conquests, counter insurgency, repression and torture, the body is literally broken apart and re-constituted: people are imprisoned, starved, and beaten; bones are broken; muscles are ripped; skin is flayed and burned; body hair is ripped out by the roots or shaved with a rusty razor; women and men are raped and sodomized; and in more extreme cases, bodies are dismembered and decapitated. The following questions are crucial in engaging these realities: What is the relationship between the body and the subject? Can a subject, enveloped by conditions of intense physical domination by the state, maintain a sense of his or her own subjectivity while the body is being repressed and tortured? Or, is torture and repression precisely the point at which subjectivity is reconstituted via the channels of the body? The Other, the insurgent subject, is obliterated, used to obliterate others, or made into a model citizen, obedient to the laws and morals of the state.²⁵ I ask: What does resistance mean within these conditions?

In the contemporary urban context of the United States: I ask: How do we theorize about or respond to such acts of power on the body, which are an all too familiar sight in poor neighborhoods in the United States where Chicanas/os, Latinas/os, African-Americans, Native Americans, Southeast Asians and the homeless—the Others of Anglo-American society—are bent over with their cuffed hands pulled back or are lying face down with arms spread, each like a fallen crucifix? As a visual semiotic what is the “language” of an arrest scenario? When an officer has somebody cuffed, bent over, or face down in order to search for drugs or weapons, the way in which that officer intervenes into the body of a “suspect” betrays a violent posture of invasion. In the case of male officers collapsing the body of male suspects there is a homoerotics possibly in denial of itself that underpins heterosexist and patriarchal culture.²⁶ What do the bodies of both the officer and “suspect” become in these situa-

tions? Are they “texts” where the micro and macro-physics of power can be read? Are the police and military the agents of master narratives whose discourse and practice suppress the Other as a counter-text?

Furthermore, what does “resistance” (in the Cultural Studies sense of the word) mean in these situations where people are severely beaten or killed because, in the words of an officer, he or she “resisted arrest.” In fact, as I wrote these words, a young Chicano from Oakland lies in the hospital in a coma because he resisted arrest. The story that circulated on the local Spanish-speaking stations recounted that officers, at the request of the victim’s family, came to arrest him because he was drunk. When he staggered because of his intoxication, his body was interpreted as resisting arrest. Police threw the young man down with such force that he received a severe concussion putting him in a coma.

In the US, a rise of theories, testimonials, and histories is empowering the marginal, the Other, the people of color, the poor, and is mounting political challenges to create a fair and just multicultural society. All of this, however, is tempered by the implementation of cuts in federal aid for education, welfare for single mothers, and job-training; the end of affirmative action; increasing prison, police, and border patrol budgets; and the enforcement of laws against sodomy and other “unnatural” sexual relationships. For people of color in general, and for Chicanas/os in particular, more police translates into more harassment, more beatings, and more unexplained deaths.²⁷ More prisons, more police, fewer educational opportunities, and no job training means that more disenfranchised youth—*cholos/as* and “homeys”—will act out the rage of racism, alienation, and poverty by shooting and raping each other for their *clicas*, their sets, their streets, and their colors—red or blue.²⁸ Meanwhile, “middle America” retreats farther into fortified suburban ethnic enclaves, buying guns, locking the doors to their houses and cars, fearing robbery, assault, and carjacking. At the same time, people glue themselves to their TV sets to watch the “heroic regulators” of postmodern society confirm their worst fears of the Other in such prime time hits as the filmed-on-location COPS or LAPD, further denigrating subaltern peoples, especially Spanish-speaking Latinas/os and African-Americans and normalizing police brutality. As we close this century and enter a new millennium, to be a witness, a victim, and a participant requires from us a state of alarm—that we write, teach, resist, and act with urgency!

Linguistic violence—the creation of the Other—interanimates violence on the body. However, the present work engenders further questioning. For example, taking into account the scenarios mentioned above,

how do we theorize on the social text of violence? Is it a language of social relations? If so, what is the *langue* and *parole* of violence? Is violence both the fringe and the center of social relations, as well as the enforcer of the social order in a given historical and cultural context? How does the consideration of physical violence impact conceptions of race, class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality? In general, future analyses need to focus directly on the interrelationship of discourse, violence, resistance and the body. Specifically, they must aim to understand further how Chicana/o bodies are “race’d,” “sex’d” and “Other’d” by discourses and practices of abjection, as well as how Chicanas/os reclaim our bodies, enunciate our subjectivities, and articulate a resistance of the spirit and the flesh.

I end this essay by considering the death of Julio Valerio, 16-year old Chicano teenager from Phoenix, Arizona whose violent and brutal killing provoked an emotional and focused panel at the NACCS, as well as, other acts of community support around issues of police violence and racism. According to the *Arizona Republic*, “Six officers fired a total of 25 rounds—20 from 9mm handguns, five from shotguns”(November, 17 1996). Six fully armed, non-Hispanic officers with impenetrable bullet vests, extensive training in arrest procedures, and whose collective physical weight was easily over a 1000 pounds were not able to subdue the slim and distressed youth without the use of lethal force. When the Phoenix police force faced public outcry, Mike Pechtel, president of the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association, responded as follows: “For their efforts, these officers are being vilified by opportunist politicians, whose support for a dope selling, dope smoking gang member is disgusting,” drawing upon the rhetoric of The War on Drugs as a way to validate the appalling use of violence on youth (*Arizona Republic*, November 26, 1996). Thus, the vicious murder of this Chicano teenager, gainfully employed at a furniture factory and with dreams of owning his own home and taking care of his family, was justified because he was perceived as a “drug crazed knife wielding gangbanger.” However, the knife Julio carried was probably so dull it could have been a butter knife.

Notes

¹José Saldívar, Vicki Ruiz, Sonya Saldívar-Hull, Ramon Gutiérrez, Teresa Mckenna, Norma Alarcón, Alfred Arteaga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Rolando Romero, Homi Bhabha, and James Clifford have made substantial contributions to critical border studies. I am especially indebted to Dr. Vicki Ruiz, and Dr. Manuel de Jesus Hernández-Gutierrez at Arizona State University for their insightful comments on this essay.

²This border was established after the defeat of General Santa Anna through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. This border is literally a straight line over 2300 miles which has no respect for natural ecosystem formations, or tribal territories. Yet this arbitrary and intentionally rigid line has an immense amount of consequences for both nations. See David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors* (1995).

³For a critique of Hicks' often-cited work, see Juan Bruce-Novoa and María Cordoba in the "Remapping the Border Subject," a key collection of essays in a special issue of *Discourse*. Ed. Rolando J. Romero. Vols. 1 and 2 (Fall-Winter 1995-96): 32-54;146-169.

⁴See Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) which catalysed the rise of border theory and discourse in the late 1980s.

⁵For a discussion of how border cultures resist and subvert these tendencies, see Guillermo Gómez-Peña's consideration of hybridity, and carnival along the border, "Border Culture: A Process of Negotiation Towards Utopia" (1986), as well as his book *Warrior for Gringostroika: Essays, Performance Texts, and Poetry* (1993).

⁶As a term, the word immigrant is problematic in understanding Mexican people. What is the status for Mexicans who lived in Mexican territories before they were annexed by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848? For a discussion of identity for recent immigrants see Rouse and Rosaldo, both of whom discuss cultural invisibility for undocumented workers in the United States.

⁷See David Maciel, Ed. *Chicanas/Chicanos at the Crossroads*, 1996.

⁸See Vickie Ruiz, " 'And Miles to Go ... ' Mexican and Work, 1930-1985" which charts systematically low wage earnings of Chicanas in *Western Women, Their Land, Their Lives*, edited by Vickie Ruiz, Janice Monk, and Lillian Schlissel. For discussion of criminalization of the Chicano community and the resultant incarceration rates, see López, Ed. *Criminal Justice and Latino Communities*, 1995

⁹For discussion of the systemic and historic criminalization of the Chicana/o community from the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo to present see Alfred Mirandé, *Gringo Justice* (1987), and Trujillo's "La Evolución del 'Bandido' al 'Pachuco': A Critical Examination and Evaluation of Criminological Literature on Chicanos" (1995). For studies that attempt to understand Chicana/o youth cultural expression on its own terms, see Brenda Jo Bright and Liza Bakewell. Eds. *Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity* (1995) , as well as Rubén Martínez, *The Other Side: Notes From the New L.A., México City and Beyond* , (1993)

¹⁰The deceptive tactic of the INS, was brought up in a talk by Dr. Lisa Magaña on the Dual Roles of the INS, given at ASU, Spring 1997.

¹¹For discussion of the savage in European colonial imagination see Lewis Hanke (1959); Hayden White (1978) and how the idea of the savage was used to justify the colonization of non-European peoples in general, see Robert C. Young, (1995), and the savagization of Chicanas/os in specific see Mirandé (1987) and De León, (1983).

¹²My use of "we" is a strategically essentialist act (Spivak, 1988) of imagining a community (Anderson, 1983) of Cultural Studies scholars, writers and

activists who are concerned with challenging racism, homophobia, sexism, and colonialism in our scholarly and theoretical work and the larger academic and non-academic communities.

¹³For good summary of the social construction of the subject from a wide range critical trajectories see Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (1988) and Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs*. 13 (1988) : 405-36. For discussion of the postcolonial hybrid subject see, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994) and Robert C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in the Theory, Culture and Race* (1995) : 1-29. For discussion of social constructivism in feminist thought, see Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (1989).

¹⁴See Saskia Sassen, "Why Migration?" *Report on the Americas*. "Special Issue on Immigration." Vol. 26. No. 1 (1992) : 14-48.

¹⁵See the National Labor Committee Education Fund in Support of Worker and Human Rights in Central America, investigation updates of the Gap clothing company in El Salvador, October 1995; also see their video, *Zoned for Slavery/The Child Behind the Label*.

¹⁶See the following: Firdous Azim, *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (1994) : 1-34; Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body* (1993) : 3-14; and Caren Kaplan "Resisting Autobiography: Out-law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects" in *Delcolonizing the Subject*. Ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (1991) : 115-139.

¹⁷To appreciate further this act of racially-coded nation state violence re-enacted in the form of a quicktime video clip, please visit the following web site: <http://cnn.com/US/9806/12/immigrant.beating/index.html>.

¹⁸Although Alicia Sotero Vasquez and Enrique Funes Flores, hospitalized for the vicious beatings by Riverside County Deputy Tracy Watson and Deputy Kurtis Franklin, will share a \$740, 000 settlement provided by the Riverside County, California Sheriffs Department, these officers will not face any indictments for civil rights violations (<http://cnn.com/US/9806/12/immigrant.beating/index.html>).

¹⁹See Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages* (1990) and Jack Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals* (1992).

²⁰See Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.

²¹See Vanderwood and Sampanaro, *Border Fury* (1988) which in general details how the Mexican Revolution became a spectator sport for Euroamericans who would sit on bleachers next to the Rio Grande, and in specific shows how any memorabilia of General Pancho Villa became a highly sought after collectors item after his death.

²²See the documentary, *School of the Americas, School of Assassins*. Maryknoll World Productions, VHS 1994.

²³Downloaded from <http://www.calweb.com/~rbbusman/outlaws/murhead.gif>.

²⁴Much of my commentary is informed the following testimonies: María Teresa Tula, *Hear My Testimony: María Teresa Tula, human rights activist of El Salvador*, 1994; Rigoberta Méncu, *I, Rigoberta Méncu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, 1993.

²⁵See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

²⁶A most poignant example of this type of violence is case of the Haitian immigrant, Abner Louima who was viciously tortured and sodomized with a toilet plunger by officers Schwarz, Volpe, Bruder, and Weise of the New York Police Department, August 9, 1997. See the following CNN website <http://cnn.com/US/9709/08/police.torture/index.html>

²⁷Examples of this are two police killings of “dubious” circumstances that come straight to mind. See “The Mendocino Murders.” San Francisco Bay Guardian. June 7, 1995: 15-18 which recounts how Leonard Davis a tribal person from the Round Valley Reservation, was “mistakenly” shot dead by an M-16 toting sheriff deputy. Also, I think of Aaron Williams a local African-American who died due to police brutality. See “12 S.F. Cops Accused by Chief of Lying.” San Francisco Chronicle. November, 27 1995. A:1, which discusses how seven officers are accused of covering-up their brutality which unjustifiably killed Aaron Williams.

²⁸Chicano/Latino gangs in San Francisco are split by *Norte* (north) symbolized by the red, and *Sur* (south) symbolized by the color blue, paralleling splits in the African American gangs: the Bloods (red) and the Crips (blue). However, I refer to an event that has troubled many activists who work with Chicano/Latino youth in the Mission area of San Francisco where two adolescent girls were abducted, gang-raped and sodomized by the opposing gang (North: Red).

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