

Pancho Villa

and His Resonance in the Border Paradigm

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Resumen – Pancho Villa y su resonancia en el paradigma fronterizo

Varios héroes mexicanos legendarios han vuelto a resurgir en el espacio público para satisfacer diversas necesidades políticas, artísticas o comerciales de distintos sectores, tanto de la sociedad mexicana como de la de los Estados Unidos. La intención del presente texto es profundizar en la figura emblemática de Pancho Villa, en relación con el marco teórico de la región fronteriza. Mi trabajo tiene la intención de responder a las siguientes preguntas: ¿qué tipo de rol adquiere el icono de la Revolución Mexicana para el actual estilo de vida Chicano y Latino? ¿Hasta qué punto Villa todavía tiene cierta viabilidad política o ideológica que habla por y para los intereses comunes de los chicanos o latinos? Quiero centrarme en cómo la figura de Villa se evoca en relación con una serie de conceptos fronterizos, porque el propio Villa inspira dudas sobre la representación de imágenes de la frontera, como construcción alegórica de la representación y de la tergiversación de la frontera física. Examino la forma en que se invoca, se discute y se reapropia su presencia en trabajos teóricos, literarios y filmicos, cuyas figuraciones temáticas giran en torno a la frontera. El trabajo está organizado en tres partes: un análisis de cómo la figura de Villa reencarna en tres contextos: teatro, cine y folclor, siempre en diálogo con los temas de la cultura fronteriza, la identidad de frontera y la representación de la frontera. Yo propongo que la figura de Villa señala conflictos y debates todavía persistentes involucrados en la región fronteriza, ya que vuelve muchas veces como un icono popular, tanto para la sociedad en general de los Estados Unidos, como para la comunidad chicana y latina.

Palabras clave: Icono revolucionario, Frontera, Obra teatral Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa, Película And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself, Corrido, Bandidos mexicanos

Abstract

Legendary Mexican heroes have reemerged in the public space to meet the varying political, artistic or commercial needs of the various sectors of both the Mexican and American society. I intend to delve into iconic figure of Pancho Villa in relation to a theoretical framework of the border region. My paper pursues answers to the following questions: what sort of relevant role does the Mexican revolutionary icon undertake for current Chicano/Latino life? To what extent does Villa still have a certain political or ideological viability that speaks for and to communal interests of Chicanos or Latinos? I want to focus on how the figure of Villa is evoked in relation to a number of border concepts because Villa himself inspires questions about the representation of images of the border, as an allegorical construct of the unrepresented/misrepresented physical frontier. I examine the ways in which his presence is invoked, discussed, and re-appropriated in theoretical, literary, and filmic works whose thematic figurations revolve around the border. Organizing my discussion in three parts, I analyze how the figure of Villa is reincarnated in three contexts: drama, film, and folklore always in dialogue with issues of border culture, border identity and border representation. I propose that the figure of Villa signals persistent conflicts and ongoing debates involving the border region as it returns, repeatedly, as a popular icon for both the U.S. mainstream society and the Chicano/Latino community.

Key words: Revolutionary Icon, Border, Shrunken Head or Pancho Villa Play, And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself Film, Corrido, Mexican Bandits

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The point of departure of this study is in the image of Emiliano Zapata that appeared on one of the political posters used in the last presidential election of the U.S. I must admit that the poster immediately sent me to a place of simultaneous fascination and discomfort. It is the "Viva Obama" poster drawn by Lalo Alcaraz, a famous Mexican American cartoonist, which was successfully mobilized to appeal to, particularly, Latino voters. This "Obama poster" was also exhibited during the 2009 inauguration week at the Latino Inaugural Celebration. Alcaraz explains his motive for reappropriating Zapata's image: "I approached the quest for the perfect

Latino-themed, mass-produced image of Barack Obama not just as an editorial cartoonist but as a media-flipping guerrilla artist. The artistic goal was to create an image that could communicate instantly to Latino voters that candidate Obama was a revolutionary figure and also ‘one of us’.²¹ The poster showcases how legendary Mexican heroes have reemerged in the public space to meet varying political, artistic or commercial needs of the various sectors of both the Mexican and the U.S society.

Francisco Villa’s presence also continues to reverberate in current cultural trends such as Pachuco in the Chicano community, social bandits like Zorro or the Mexican vaquero in Hollywood movies, and narco-saints like Jesús Malverde especially in the border region. Villa’s revival is, in fact, more enthusiastically, affirmed in popular culture such as pop music, t-shirts, posters, cartoons, films, etc. These cultural practices remind us that the relevance of one of the most popular Mexican revolutionary icons, Villa, to current Chicano/Latino life continues. To what extent does Villa still have a certain political validity or ideological viability in representing communal interests of Chicano or Latino? As I pursue answer to the question, I examine the figure of Villa in light of the border framework, which in itself will be a central issue in this study. In fact, Villa is easily associated with the border, historically and figuratively, because of his raid on Columbus, New Mexico, in 1916 and the ensuing U.S. Punitive Expedition in Mexico, led by General John J. Pershing. The U.S. responded to the raid with a large-scale military intervention in northern Mexico. As a result of the intervention, there emerged instant visual projections of the geographical demarcation of the U.S. territory in the form of photographs, newsreels, and feature films produced by the mass media. Therefore, Villa himself inspires questions about the representation of images of the border, as an allegorical construct of the unrepresented / misrepresented physical frontier.

As indicated by the titles of books like, *The Posthumous Career of Emiliano Zapata: Myth, Memory, and Mexico’s Twentieth Century* or *Writing Pancho Villa’s Revolution: Rebels in the Literary Imagination of Mexico*, key figures of the Revolution have been mystified, celebrated, condemned, and resurrected as the predecessors of contemporary rebellious icons. The continued fascination with these revolutionaries alerts us to how the social and political particularities of a certain period affect their reinterpretation and re-appropriation throughout the post-revolutionary period in Mexico. Hence, in this study, I am less interested in discussing the common, contesting or even competing renditions of the image of

1. Alcaraz, Lalo (2009). “How Viva Obama Came About”, in: *Aztlán*, 34(2), 205.

Pancho Villa. Neither do I seek to offer a panoramic view of the prevailing accounts about Pancho Villa in academic literature. Rather, I want to focus on how Pancho Villa is evoked in relation to the concept of border and related corollaries², which are already widely examined in Chicano studies or border studies.

This paper examines the ways in which his presence is memorialized, discussed, and re-appropriated in theoretical, literary, and filmic works whose thematic figurations revolve around the border. In my discussion I analyze how the figure of Villa reincarnates in three contexts: drama, film, and folklore, always in dialogue with issues of border culture, border identity and border representation. My selection for these three cultural and artistic articulations is that they are all intersected by a common element: visibility and visuality. The visual element is central to my discussion, even though I do not discuss amply the theoretical implications, because the return of Pancho Villa's figure generally adopts a visually-charged representation, thus bringing to the forth the constitutive tension between form and content embedded in representation.

Pancho Villa's embodiment

of border identity

Rafael Pérez-Torres articulates that in the 70s' Chicano visual art,

...images of Mexican national heroes such as Pancho Villa and Emilio Zapata appear again and again as icons imbricated in a historical memory meant to evoke national pride, cultural distinction, political resistance, and a sense of shared community (118).

Chicano iconography, especially on the poster as a public form of visual art, however, has changed primarily as a response to emerging needs to diversify the representation of Chicano identity and to convey a desire for social and communal connections. In the case of Chicano narrative, especially in drama, Villa's presence, albeit clearly inspirational, adopts a curious form. Luis Valdez's *Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa* shows the resurrected Villa as a bodiless head to symbolize the existence and meaning of Mexican heritage in Chicano family. The bodiless head reminiscent of

2. To locate Villa in the border paradigm necessarily demands that we examine how the meaning of border is configured. Even though its figuration exceeds the scope of my discussion, the prevalent use and even usefulness of the term in this study forces me to draw a general picture of the debates regarding border theories. I summarize the debates around the following categories: a gradually militarized zone, a haven for individual deviants as in the western genre, or a mutually permeable utopian space according to the border theories in the 80-90's academic field.

the disappeared head of the historical Villa, who had been decapitated, is a powerfully new portrayal of Chicano identity in the history of Chicano art and narrative. The return of the severed head is mobilized to signal the (eternal) return of a community's historical and cultural past. The heroic image of Villa in the literary or dramatic genre is readapted and recodified as a counter-discursive, resistant, and even subversive narrative, such as in *The Chronicles of Panchita Villa and Other Guerilleras* by Tey Diana Rebolledo or in *Heroes and Saints* by Cherrié Moraga.

As stated above, part of the purpose of this discussion is to crystallize how current the figure of the Villa represented in the 60s remains particularly in relation to issues of border identity. In the following pages, I focus on the way in which the dramatist symbolizes and represents what he perceives and understands to be one of the most crucial aspects of border identity: suffering. Suffering seems to accompany pervasively the formation of border identity, independent of the time and particular circumstances. Thus, his 60's portrayal is still valid because he visually addresses the existential, affective and psychological pain, which is unavoidably embedded in the process of forming border identity. My analysis focuses on how the figure of Villa embodies border identity, based on particular set of visual articulations.

Valdez' drama mobilizes Villa's image to represent the in-between identity, which continues to be an irreconcilable struggle of profound and lasting magnitude for most Chicanos. The figure of Villa in this play is deployed to explore the old, yet still prevalent issue of reconfiguring identity conflicts between Chicanos and Mexicans in the broad and varied space of Chicano texts. The fluid use of combined terms for self-identification such as Chicano, Mexican American or Mexican throughout the Chicano history reveals that one's personal choice for self-address responds to the degree to which an individual is relocated through mental or cultural migration or assimilation.

In *Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*, Villa's now-missing head returns as an oversized disembodied head, the only figure that talks, eats and dreams. By satirizing and parodying defiantly stereotypical images, Luis Valdez, a representative Chicano dramatist leading *El Teatro Campesino* since the 60s, challenges the essentialist, and thus oversimplified, identity imposed on Chicanos by primarily Anglo American discourses.³ Valdez' plays include tragicomic portrayals that dramatize effectively Chicano's crisis of identity and their struggle to survive. Valdez's work's emotive and intel-

3. From the perspective of now, his contestation to these stereotypical images is limited. But in the 60s, his representation exceeds the dominant portrayal of Chicanos based on racial and ethnic essentialist concepts.

lectual impact owes to the fact that he stages a political subversion within the boundaries of dramatic performance. The revolutionary zeal of Villistas coalesces to form and shape the incipient political consciousness of Chicano barrio in the 60s. However, his extremely expressionistic representation of Villa as grotesque, implicitly self-mocking and even a miserable persona enables the story to apprehend a sense of reality and thus fashions a dramatic space that mirrors such reality. Thus, his embodiment of Villa is as much solid as surreal. The play suggests that the aspiration for revolution remains as undeniably strong as the revolution's impossibility.

The play presents the brothers of the family, Joaquín and Mingo, as antithetical figures. Mingo rejects his Mexican heritage and breaks the relationship with his family and community in order to escape from desperate poverty. Bearing interesting associations, the name of the other brother, Joaquín alludes to the name of Joaquín Murrieta, a Mexican "Robin Hood" in the border region in California. By the end of the play, Joaquín returns from jail to the family with a disturbingly anomalous appearance: a body but no head. The oldest brother, Belarmino who only has a head without body, claims to be the missing head of Villa and attempts to mobilize the Mexican American community for a revolution. Toward that end, he endeavors to unite his head to Joaquín's body. The play rehearses the three archetypes of Chicano Identity, both individual and collective, a topic that has been established by Chicano/Latino literature on identity debates and politics throughout the last several decades: Mingo's struggle to assimilate to Anglo culture so as to become a fully accepted middle class citizen; Joaquín's extreme transformation from being a political radical to a reformed Mexican American through the experience of imprisonment; Belarmino's obstinate reclaiming of Mexican heritage and national identity.

Because of Belarmino's dramatic presence on stage, one of the central interests of the audience resides mainly in examining how Valdez relates Belarmino's surreal and cartoon-style presence to the Chicano family's struggle for life. The figure of Villa in this play embodies a host of both positive and negative elements: on the one hand it evokes the notion of ideal and potential. And on the other, it speaks of a brittle, repetitive history that manifests as an obstructive past for the family. The family finds itself in continued financial crisis not only because Villa's relentless appetite for food goes undiminished, but also because Lupe, the daughter of the family, gives birth to a baby who has only a head without body. Nevertheless, the play deploys Villa's popular image to interrogate but at the same time stimulate the political consciousness of contemporary Chicanos. For example, Joaquín says, "we rob the rich to give to the poor, like Pancho Villa" (174)

or Belarmino beseeches, “so don’t worry, my people, because one of these days Pancho Villa will pass among you again. Look to your mountains, your pueblos, your barrios. He will be there” (191). Though oblique at times, many forms of criticism of poverty, socio-political oppression, and marginalization resonate with Villa’s presumed revolutionary aims.

Irrespective of Valdez’s purpose, the play helps to define the now canonical concept of the border between Chicanos and Mexicans, which has become in some ways a less pertinent norm for the kaleidoscopic reality of the 21st century. Due to the continuously growing number of Mexican immigrants, there exist multifarious layers of identities that cross throughout the terms Chicano and Mexican, negotiating between a nationalistic mode of resistance and a more consensus-oriented mode that cannot deny the predominant multiplicity of identities. In addition, multiple layers based on various factors such as language, assimilation level, economic status, political affiliation, affective distance, renders Chicano identity hardly definable and intelligible for hermetic literary or theoretical articulation. Valdez’s theatrical representation reveals for the author’s insistence on interpreting border identity within the frame of the 60s’ politically charged environment of cultural nationalism in part led by Teatro Campesino, whose performances contributed to galvanizing the Chicano movement. The binary structure that separates Chicanos and Mexicans remains so dominant in the play that the nuanced and multi-layered composition of identities prevalent in the Chicano community remains unrepresented. Valdez’s faithfulness to the Chicano identity crisis is, thus, limited as polarized phenomenon, rather than the multifarious representation that can encompass an ever-changing and complex reality.

Belarmino: Que no hable inglés. El totache. Háblame in spanish.

Joaquín: Sorry, man, I don’t speak it. No hablo español.

Belarmino: Méndigos pochos. (Pause) Mira, chavo... ah, you... mexicano, ¿no?

Joaquín: Who, me? Nel, man, I’m Chicano.

Belarmino: No seas pendejo.

Joaquín: Who, you calling a pendejo?!

Belarmino: You, tú, tú Mexican! ¡Pendejo! Mira, espérate... ahhh, you Mexican, me

Mexican... ahhh, this one familia Mexican, eh? ¡Mingo, no! Mingo es gringo.

¿Comprendes? (158)

The above dialogue is predicated on decided generalizations of Chicano identities such as Chicano, Mexican, pocho, gringo, which, in fact, no longer fit hermetic definitions, due to the complex dynamics whereby Chicano identity comes to form in the 21st century. In other words, today's usage of the terms, Chicano and Mexican, does not straddle just between the U.S. and Mexico, rather, the use of these two terms points to the gradually complicated matrix that is identities.

Nonetheless, as mentioned before, in spite of Valdez's limited perspective on the concept of border imposed by the 60s, his work offers relevant and meaningful contributions to the current Chicano debate. In the first place, his configuration of Belarmino at least attempts to overcome the "essence-experience binary" pattern and thus creates a new type of Chicano revolutionary. He does not criticize, nor underestimates, nor embellishes, nor romanticizes the many conflicts associated with the figure of Villa.

Belarmino is unconventionally portrayed as a powerless Chicano who yearns to embody Mexican nationalism in the barrio, yet, never wants to return to Mexico. A Villa imbued with the Mexican past serves as a rich metaphor, powerful enough to persist by mere inheritance. Ironically, however, the metaphor is as respected as is also quite unwelcomed, consequently enabling the play to escape from the once-fashioned stereotypical pattern. The play clearly exhibits the limitation of the analogy or association Belarmino/Villa through the inordinate portrayal of his appearance and behavior. He seems to be a multivalent, surreal and grotesque figure that exceeds any possible stereotype and thus becomes literally a floating signifier: his abnormally large head, his insatiable appetite demanding beans and huge cockroaches, his aspiration for survival requiring the sacrifice of yet another family member. Even though Belarmino/Villa obviously delivers the political message summoning people and their support for opposition and resistance, his argument fails to be solid in substance or convincing in rhetoric because of the surreal (or unreal) depiction and hyperbolic staging of Belarmino's physicality, revealed as a big head on a table. It is interesting that the voice for political opposition materializes in a monstrous aberration that exists without body, without the tools for immediate action.

Hence the potential for a revolution remains only at the discursive level. When Belarmino yells "TRAIDORA TU RAZA" (180) to Mingo, he only annoyingly responds, "SPEAK ENGLISH" (181). Except for the fifth act, what Belarmino attempts to address mostly in Spanish is not fully understood by the family members because of a language barrier. In addition,

when Lupe asks “Without English there’s no welfare” (183) Belarmino strongly insists, “I am here and I take care of you now. Just wait till the Revolución” (183). But what he is now waiting for is no other than welfare the disable, which would allow him to get food. His verbal demand for historical legitimacy and communal spirit vainly pervades the private space of family life without any form of meaningful communication.

One could argue that his ideas are reduced to being pure ideology without any realistic possibility of being carried out into action. The missing body represents the action that persistently eludes the ideas represented by his floating head. Belarmino’s evocation of the Mexican past and heritage, which partly reveals the effort to forge Mexican nationalism based on a newly awoken collective consciousness, only serves to emphasize, tragically, the futility of not only the past but also the act of recuperating it. His discursive validity continues to be deferred to a messianic future since it only manages to exist at the level of the imaginary and the symbolic. The paradox is, however, that in that deferment the discursive validity is also sustained.

Valdez fractures the mechanical association between stereotypical images of Chicano and the protagonists in the play by making figurative expression and performance of the main characters’ psychological reality to literal visualization. The Villa in the 60s dramatically addresses physical embodiment of fundamental pains such as displacement, marginality, shame that border identity is supposed to engage in incurring. In other words, if Valdez asserts that the play reveals “the psychological reality of the barrio,” (132) I argue that the plays also offers a visual articulation of each member of the family in the form of physical, affective and mental abnormality that dramatizes the very pain and wound associated with being interstitial or in-between state.

As the play ends, all family members who are implicitly or explicitly related to the historical Villa allude to the failure of the chronically precarious political, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions. The father, Pedro, who misses Villa’s revolutionary ideals and yearns to return to Zacatecas, is killed in a train accident. The mother, Cruz, who was actually a Villista during the Revolution, endlessly suffers from the arduous task of caring for Belarmino/Villa. Joaquín who aspires to attain Villa’s unofficial sanctioning power ends up in jail being a headless body. Mingo who, after having rejected the ‘lousy and greasy’ (168) Chicano family, returns home as a social worker to investigate Belarmino’s physical disability. His

return, however, does not mitigate his condition of permanent oblivion and irregular assimilation to American middle-class culture. Lupe's baby also evokes physical abnormality and thus figures the dominant presence of Villa in the family as well as Chicano society at large.

In sum, the figure of Villa plays a relentless symbolical role in configuring Chicano Identity amid the conflicts among the attachment to Mexican roots, the denial of cultural identity, and the forced or voluntary existential adaptation. Villa's image gestures to the lingering repercussions not only in terms of vivid memories of the Mexican Revolution, but also in terms of affective and psychological attachments to Mexico itself, such as reminiscence, indifference, hope, solace, ignorance and frustration. All of these emotional and psychological factors become embodied by each of the family members. On the one hand, Villa becomes symbolized or allegorized in arguably realistic terms. On the other hand, the symbols and allegories prove to be insufficient as they fail to reflect the real world in ways that articulate border identity as the equivalent of identity formation in progress, to avoid being reduced to a simplistic binary structure that by definition denies nuanced and subtle permutations. In fact, collective identity, or *barrio* identity as represented by Valdez, does not rightly attest to a spectrum large enough to reflect the gradually complicated matrix of identities. In this sense, Valdez's representation proves irredeemably insufficient, but at the same time it accurately reflects how iconic figures and representations operate, tendentiously, at the level of the universal by functioning only as archetypes, and thus effacing or flattening the contradictions of the differences that mark the individual.

Nevertheless, Villa's iconic image is consistently valid because it remains centered on the discussion of Chicano identity. That both opposing trajectories revolve around the charged space of the border not only leads to the multi- or pluri-mode of subject formation, but also makes reference to a more lasting core issue, the play's deformed physical imprints. Currently border identity is generally deployed as an all-encompassing and overarching concept in Chicano/Latino studies. But because of its theoretical plasticity and academic multiple aims, ironically it obscures the diverging realities with which this term engages. The play from the 60s invigorates us visually to see the fundamental elements of opposing trajectories across the border, a space in-between that often times leads to distortion, deformation and abnormality.

Pancho Villa's role

in border representation

While the first part of my discussion shows how border identity is represented through the dissonance that persists between Villa's physical configuration and discursive articulation, the following part focuses on how the figure of Villa is mobilized to represent the physical border per se in another visual medium, film. As I suggested earlier, the figure of Villa can be understood as a floating signifier precisely because it serves various purposes of signification and figuration.

Many are the films about Pancho Villa that, irrespective of when they were made, point to his lasting popularity as the exemplary representative of social and political resistance, even subversion, or a revolutionary commodity of unfulfilled ideals, as a protagonist of Mexican nationalistic project or as Hollywood's most seductive Mexican superstar. In casting a quick look at the names of Hollywood actors that have performed or will in the near future, we wonder why they don't resemble one another, nor do they resemble the conventional Mexican appearance of Villa; Yul Brynner, Antonio Banderas, Johnny Depp who was projected to take on the role of Villa in 2011 but recently has come to reject the role –Gael García Bernal has been cast to replace him– are some of the actors that form an eclectic list of names in the U.S. It suggests that the filmic versions of Villa are not limited to the portrayal of a fable-like stereotype like Robin Hood or reduced to a predictable archetype from the Mexican revolutionary. The Villa created from the perspective of Hollywood is subject to fallacy and intentionality, but such a distorted perspective is not exclusive to Hollywood's fallibility.

The Revolution and its heroes have been widely explored with respect to diverse topics such as the articulation of Mexican nationalism or racial otherness, visual reconstruction and discursive re-appropriation of Mexicanidad, etc. Just a cursory look suffices to notice that the Revolution has been disparately narrated, painted, photographed and filmed by Mexican and foreign artists, who offer at times idiosyncratic versions that reflect their political vicissitudes. During and after the Revolution, the convergence between film and other visual media, including photography, painting, and graphic arts has been useful in forging the collective memories of a nation. Be it with favorable or unfavorable consequences, the Revolution has been apprehended by visual representation.

According to Olivier Debroise, the Mexican Revolution “was photographed from every point of view, both geographically and ideologically” (Pick, 42). Exercising historical fidelity, the film *And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself* (2003) represented the border in ways that exactly coincide with the images in photographs taken on the main border cities taken during the Revolution. The film originates from an actual deal between Villa and the Mutual Film Company for the film *The Life of General Villa*, whose original print went missing. Building on biographical facts combined with fictitious dramatization, the storyline basically deals with how Villa became engaged in the film production by the Mutual Film Company when he was active in battlefields. The film also addresses Villa’s aspirations to accomplish genuine popularity by making marketable what he understood to be the authentic version of the Revolution, which had been manipulated into obscurity by the U.S. major media. What interests me in this film is how the figure of Villa comes to represent both the geographical and ideological division that is constitutive of the border region. I argue that the representation of the border in this film is, in turn, indicative of the strong persistence of the notion of ‘the national’ in a period in which the concept of the ‘the transnational’ had been increasingly advanced as the most viable alternative to an obsolete nationalism. The notion of ‘the national’ becomes evident, in particular, in the staging of various visual registers of the border and spectatorship, the first compelling moment taking place upon the first appearance of Villa in the movie.



At first glance, one is tempted to consider the scene to include significant exaggeration perhaps for the purpose of filmic dramatization. That explanation, however, is unconvincing given that the scene is neither from filmic imagination, nor for effective representation or strategic allocation. It is portrayed based on the screenwriter's allegedly thorough research on Villa's biography. The screenwriter, Larry Gelbart claims that the film intends to represent historical truth. According to him, armed with experts in the field such as Friedrich Katz, the leading Villa historian, and Margarita de Orellana, author of *La mirada circular: el cine norteamericano de la revolución Mexicana 1911-1917* as well as a book on Villa and Zapata" (Bruce-Novoa, 2), the filmmakers attempted to portray what really happened. As the filmmakers claim, the movie faithfully portrays the visual narrative that commonly appears on postcards of border cities such as El Paso/Juárez during the Revolution. As a result, U.S. citizens are clearly contrasted with Mexican soldiers as the photos below show; it dramatizes the contrast between people in the business of entertainment and their counterparts in that of war.

According to Aurelio de los Reyes who deals with newsreel coverage in the USA of the revolution in the book, *Con Villa en México*, mass media coverage of the Revolution was very common, and the postcards and newsreels portray U.S. citizens as collective spectators in front of or behind invisible borderlines. According to Claire Fox in *The Fence and the River*, "Revolution-watching was a middle and upper-class leisure activity" (81) and to enjoy the show abundantly, U.S. spectators sought to find a convenient vantage point from places like train cars, riverbanks, bluffs, and even rooftops of hotels (81).

The movie shows dramatic scenes in which the staff of the Mutual Film Company have no alternative than to shoot the battle scene in real battle areas in order to capture the event vividly and thus produce a mimetic imprint of the battle as it transpired historically. Hence, each scene is designed with utmost historical precision. For instance, particular battle scenes are staged and timed in accordance with when the guns were actually shot. The fictional stage for the film is superimposed over the actual locus of the Revolution. And during the filming of the scenes, history and fiction occupy literally the same space. We must remember that film produces such an analogical register that once imprinted on the celluloid, the moment of coexistence can never be altered. This scene exemplifies effectively "a division along national lines as to whether the Revolution was perceived principally as entertainment or as a historical-political event," (Fox, 82) even though the producer of the film ironically intends to obliterate the



(Fox, 82)

division by attempting to capture what is as close as possible to registered reality.⁴ Consequently, the exquisite coincidence between the film and photographic images attests to the view that “theatrical metaphors common to both visual entertainment and military strategy –such as stage, theater, and shooting– were ironically coterminous when it came to some border battles” (Fox, 82). The very coincidence supports the idea that the film only serves to reinforce the persistence of the hegemonic position of the U.S. regardless of the producer’s unwillingness to accept it. The producer rather appears to believe that the film overtly responds to historical demand, or Villa’s wishes and desires.

This photograph shows that the dominant gaze belongs to Frank Thayer, who, a director and a representative of the Mutual Film Company later turns out to be another, perhaps even real, protagonist. It must be noted that the portrayal and narration of Villa gets mediated by Thayer’s perspective and memory. The scene stages the first encounter between Thayer and Villa in the Revolution. The spectator and actor on this scene, according to the meta-structure of the film, simultaneously manifest themselves in its multilayered matrix through the amplified lens of a telescope that reflects Villa’s riding a horse on the other side of the border. Carefully maneuvered, the scene indirectly reveals that Thayer’s gaze approximates the battle as a spectacle.

4. Juan Bruce-Novoa, in “Pancho Villa: Post-Colonial Colonialism or the Return of the Americano”, asserts that the 2003 filmmakers propose a closer and less mediated encounter with Villa to reflect the 1914 film that addresses Villa’s desire to speak.

Moreover, there is another type of spectator inside of the film, one who sees the black and white silent film when it premiered in a New York theater in 1914. They are allowed to view only the final edited version of the film. The first film of Mutual is rejected by the critics because a documentary style treatment of the topic simply fails to attract commercial and national interests. The second film, however, this time reproduced based on the faithful filming of the battles and the portrayals of Villa's personal life in accordance with the inner logic of filmic narrative, is enthusiastically welcomed by the U.S. audiences in the final scene. Lastly, we the viewers are asked to position ourselves as spectators and render the final say when viewing the movie of 2003. HBO filmmakers seem poised to trust viewers to act as final judges since we are provided with an opportunity to witness the whole uncut versions of Villa.

Similarly, three types of actors are embedded in the meta-structure of the movie. As the title indicates, Villa as the real revolutionary accepted the offer to perform himself in the film-inside-the-film, *The Life of General Villa*. The second actor is a famous Spanish celebrity, Antonio Banderas, who performs Villa with a faux Mexican accent. Of course, Banderas' popular presence impregnated with machista sexuality points to the commercial interests of the HBO's production in 2003. As a third actor, Villa, a general of the ordinary soldiers taking part in the battle of the film reveals himself as the heroic, violent, and necessarily exotic leader for



(Pick, 46)

U.S. viewers.⁵ The film seductively promotes that reductive reading of the Revolution, which is bestowed relentlessly with an aura of exotic mystery to generate pleasurable entertainment. The disposition of the producer and the eye of the camera severely prevent that the subject matter be treated as an ensanguined historically traumatic event. The film renders this part of history almost as pure adventurous fiction rather than capturing it as an interpreted memory from the past.

Besides the triple structure, the characteristics of meta-film are noticeable because the meta-film challenges Hollywood's misrepresentations of the historical Villa. In other words, not only does it resist mimicking but as a result it deconstructs the mass-mediated construct of Villa's image. According to the logic of the meta-film, representing critically the historical Villa demands that the film reveal, through its own form and production, how Villa himself wants to be represented and interpreted as a military leader as well as a representative of the Revolutionaries. Accordingly, the HBO filmmakers of the year 2003, at least apparently, intend to design the very meta-plotline to be able to reflect the intention of the Mutual filmmakers of the year 1914, which was to portray the human Villa as closely as possible to reality. However, their intention fails to be accomplished. The HBO filmmakers get to create confusion by conflating their own intention with that of the inside film, and by pretending to materialize "an expressed desire on the part of Villa, a desire that would cover both the 1914 and the 2003 projects" (Bruce-Novoa, 4). As opposed to their ostensible purpose of production visualized in the story line, the HBO filmmakers don't portray transparently the individual that was Villa. Instead, they are only faithful to the filmic principle and commercial reason of the 2003 project supported by the same Hollywood production. They cannot betray their own agenda, only to occlude it by manipulating the means and ends of the meta-structure.

Nevertheless, due to the threefold representation projected through the perspective of the meta-film, the viewers who see the 2003 film can be irresistibly induced to take Villa as the truthful representation of the historical figure and to regard Villa's cinematically adjusted identity to be alive and trustworthy. Therefore, the viewers can become allured or even be beguiled by the filmmakers' treatment of the Revolution and portrayal of the border in a similar way. While they uncritically see the Revolution first as the stage for the film, the viewers are unknowingly exposed to border images reintensified by the film, which serves as a demarcation

5. I draw evidence from Fox to argue that "from the U.S. point of view, the Revolution was a drama, and its soldiers were actors" (83).

between spectator and play. They can do nothing except succumb to the border images reconsolidated by the film.

The border region, especially in twin cities in the area, is arguably discussed as a geographical, cultural, and economic unit that precedes the Revolution. To examine the similarities existing in the twin cities, postcards that offer serialized images of the city landscape contain archival value and thus become invaluable cultural texts. After Tijuana and El Paso, Nogales is the third border location that appears most popularly represented in city postcards. In addition to the myriad of information they offer, they portray in loud terms how the fence and gates around the bordered cities have changed from invisible yet secure separation to the metal fences now with military protection that circumscribe and separate this contact zone of mutual resemblance.⁶

These three photos (in the next page) suggest that the border region cannot be regarded as an inherently divisive zone of demarcation. It is normally argued that the contact zone has not been properly visualized whereas the facing border areas or twin cities have been instead visually historicized, elaborately popularized, and ideologically internalized. Fox argues that the border symbolizes the demarcation between

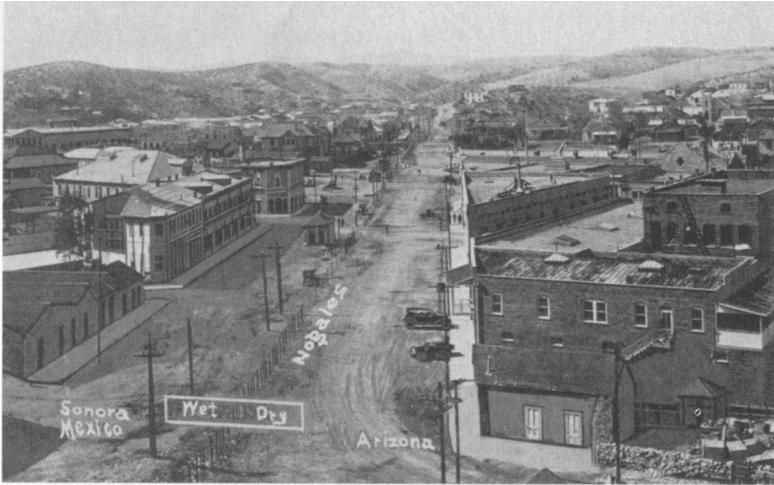
Anglo/Mexican, masculine/feminine, civilization/barbarism and master/servant. In this respect, it was not just Pershing and Villa, but also the border, as a marker of difference, that became an overnight celebrity (70).

The border is constructed space with ramifications that pervade culture, politics, and, of course, the economy. The construction of the border, however, depends on a dual process that not only generates cultural, political and economic ramification, but it also operates based on them.

The film capitalizes on the body of archival information that registered Villa's engagement in *The Life of General Villa* in order to fulfill the filmmakers' agenda, which in fundamental ways conflicted with Villa's desired purpose for the film. As the film endeavors to represent Villa's agency and identity undoubtedly mediated by Thayer's gaze and memory, the representation of the border, thus, never defies the position of the U.S.

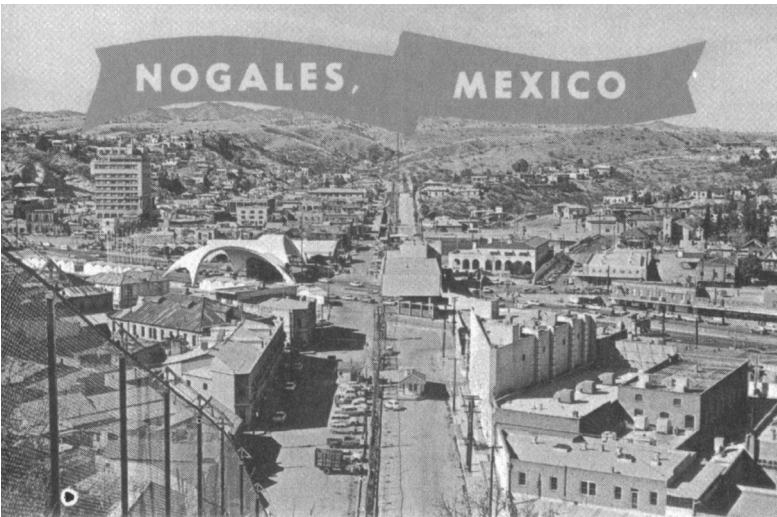
In fact, such a representation goes so far as to secure, paradoxically, the allegorical image of 'the national' and all the embedded ideology in it, which in turn ends up marking hierarchical 'difference'. Therefore, the

6. Daniel D. Arreola, in "The Fence and Gates of Ambos Nogales: A Postcard Landscape Exploration", shows diverse photographs including those below about Nogales in order to attest to the similarity between two adjacent homonymous cities.



(Arreola, 2004 - The photo was taken in 1925)

film cannot help reproducing uncritically the old portrayals of the border as the dividing line between order and chaos as it reinforces the system of logic and values of Hollywood. In this middlebrow movie, the figure of Villa serves to inject a new force into the meaning of difference visualized in the physical border area.

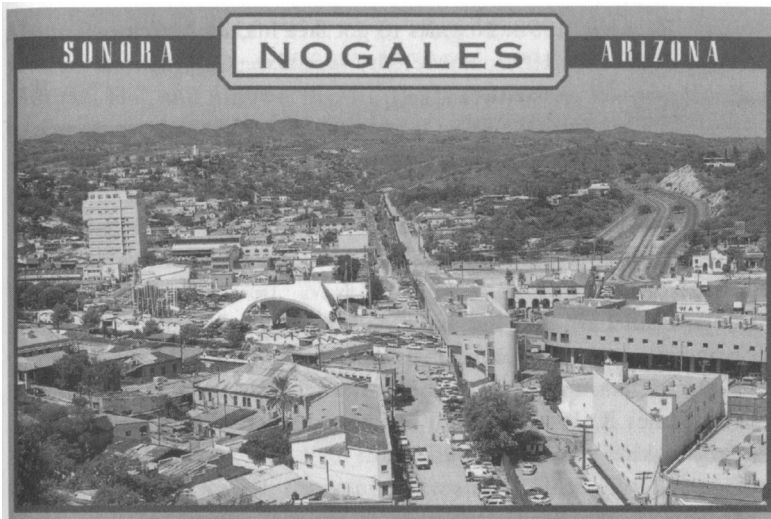


(Arreola, 2004 - The photo was taken in 1965)

Pancho Villa's resurrection

in border culture

Having looked into how the involvement of the figure of Villa becomes associated with the representation of the physical border, in the remainder of the paper I turn my attention to the way in which Villa's signifier functions in the culture that border dwellers continue to both produce and consume. Anchored at the center of border culture,⁷ the figure of Villa attracts different and even discordant critical interpretations depending on who appropriates his image and toward what ends. Folkloric, commercial or national



(Arreola, 2004- The photo was taken in 1995)

perspectives hardly ever mobilize his image in the same way. Besides being a figure and an image, Villa has become, as I mentioned earlier in my discussion, a signifier that occupies a vital place in the discourse of border. The different assessment about Villa's signifier is inherently related to the border issue itself. In recent cultural studies, the border has been regarded as a place of paradox. Hence, any symbolic or allegorical representation that takes the border as the point of figurative departure varies precisely because paradox and contradiction inhere in this liminal zone.

7. Border culture, a key term in Chicano/Latino studies, serves to implicate a history of reading for oppositionality and resistance.

Although peripheral to the main aims of my discussion here, the question of what border is and means demands to be addressed. Exploring the diversity of popular and artistic discourses surrounding the significance of the figure of Villa cannot be conducted independently of a thorough examination of border culture theories. In simple terms, border culture is the culture of a third space that belongs simultaneously to both the U.S. and Mexico. However, border culture seems subject to the political vicissitudes between the two countries. In the border region, physical, personal, and cultural entities intersect one another as they also run parallel each other with extraordinary intensity; and, on the other hand, the border is also being turned into a military fortress. Contradictory features compete with one another within a common space: Must we consider the porous boundaries to serve the integration of the two hemispheres through political intervention, economic globalization, and transnational migration? Or conversely, is the border's predominant identity to be the prohibition of fluid and unmonitored mobility enforced by border patrol and immigration restriction imposed by anti-immigrant laws and strengthening militarization?

In other words, border is the site of incommensurabilities, an aspect that can be traced back to early periods, especially to the late 19th century and the early 20th century. Historically rooted, the contradictions that we associate with the border region resonate with or correlate to the divergent approaches to the figure of Villa. The simplistic dichotomy that persists when it comes to the name of Villa depends on how his banditry, whether considered noble or villainous, is appropriated and represented. Is he a social bandit, or heroic revolutionary? The presence of Villa has produced, invoked and collaborated in popular and artistic forms such as border corrido and bandit narrative. The representation unveils two incongruous purposes: an imaginary and almost utopian assessment of Villa's legend versus a reminder of the U.S. centrality by sustaining him as a symbol of a chaotic nation.

I want to deal with Villas' stereotypically dichotomous images first, and later turn to the more positively nuanced assessment of Villa's image in the context of border culture. In the border region culture, the correlation between Villa and the corrido cannot be omitted as the association of the two is frequently evinced in contemporary border culture. Many scholars have argued convincingly that today's permanence of the corrido owes its close ties with the figure of Villa. Recently, the corrido⁸ has morphed into a

8. The corrido, as a vessel of oral history and societal myth, appeals to musical customers and traditional listeners because it is believed to deliver *la pura verdad*. Other than this consistent characteristic, the definition of the corrido takes multiple and even divergent forms. It is commonly accepted that the "corrido has been popularly portrayed as a cultural form that registers events and subjects that state-controlled records do not" (Villalobos and Ramírez-

subgenre, narcocorrido, and enjoys flourishing moments of popularity, even though the latter is also increasingly criticized because of its glorification the narcotraficante at the fringes of the law. The critical treatment of the corrido has been certainly ambivalent. On the one hand, there is positive analysis that produces the counter-memory or contesting rendition of border issues for the voiceless people. In order to fulfill the mentioned purpose, the genre inherently requires the popular portrayal of a hero as the central component. The need to have a hero at the center of the corrido seems to explain why the iconic image of Villa remains so ubiquitous. For instance, Los Tigres del Norte, a band of Música Norteña, exemplifies the genre and has been catapulted to fame because it resorts to both traditional and contemporary outlaw imagery. This band sings the feats of Villa in a corrido titled by “El Siete Leguas”. Brujería, a death metal band, also captures Villa’s revolutionary and heroic images in one song in their third album under the title “Division del Norte” named after Villa’s troops.⁹

Pancho Villa has not died, I’ve got his spirit right here with me... Zapatisimo has not died, I’ve got its spirit right here with me... Northern Division! So that Mexico can live!... Long live our revolution, once again Villa will command... Get everyone together, cry out for war!

Besides, the lyric of ‘Estrategia de guerra’ sung by Voz de Mando includes “Con su estrategia de guerra, con tropas y carabinas/ es un macho 7 leguas/ al frente pa que lo sigan/ el gran Gonzalo has de cuenta/ el general Pancho Villa.” Brujería and Voz de Mando’s exemplary songs show that Villa’s presence has never faded out from the contemporary representations of the ‘real’ border.

The persistent echo of Villa’s lingering presence in the genre of Chicano pop culture can be also explained by the very characteristics of border banditry. Villa’s re/appearance in the genre of Chicano rap is indebted to a positive appropriation of Mexican banditry, now viewed as sites that enable the representation of alternative cultural values equivalent to sprouts of social rebellion. For example, the rap part of ‘Bamseeeya’ sung by Kid Frost in the Album “Smile now Die Later” says that “Bam, see ya/ Wouldn’t wanna be ya/ Blasting on fools like Pancho Villa”.

Re-signifying the name of Villa in the context of corrido/Chicano pop supports the argument that as narratives or artistic forms, Mexican banditry

Pimienta:129). That is, the corrido has served as a recorder of history not of great men and officially canonized figures, but of the ordinary people usually fighting on the margins. Compared to its sub-counterpart, the original genre has relatively withered, yet, it continues to be meaningful for border residents.

9. See Rachel Conover’s article, “Brujería and the US-Mexico Border Outlaw” for a detailed description of this album.

casts a long shadow over the Mexican present, influencing debates about the character of real and alleged outlaws in contemporary Mexico (Frazer, 1). And as this study attempts to show, it has imparted equally great influence in the border region. Whether the corrido or narcocorrido, its popularity is embedded in adverse societal conditions stemming from the struggling Mexican economy and the U.S. treatment of them as undocumented or undesired, in the best cases, and as outright illegal in the worst. To the perspective of corrido listeners, Villa's banditry is quickly associated with social and political struggles. The associations do not limit themselves to conflict but also make reference to a popular mythology, communal recognition of a lost form of truth,¹⁰ counter-memory of marginal and even obscured history, and the yearning for the realization of unfulfilled dreams, even if merely in the imaginary symbolic space of a song.

As in the corrido, Pancho Villa is commonly referred to as the most infamous Mexican bandit and screen legend, as Camilla Fojas affirms in her book *Border Bandits*. The academic consensus, however, is that Villa's banditry has not been rightly reconfigured. The inaccurate representation is not exclusive to Villa's image, but can be traced in reference to other Mexican bandits, whose persistently reductive image in the U.S. has survived mainly through Hollywood feature films. Undoubtedly, there are plenty examples of positive, resistant, folkloric and vernacular versions of bandits even in the northern part of the border. In spite of these local narratives, predominant portrayals of Mexican bandits including of Villa in the mainstream media and film industries, nonetheless, have endeavored to assuage U.S' anxieties by channeling and reinforcing the discourse of hegemony of their nation-state. Fojas argues that Hollywood border films have brought forth "diverse versions of social bandits in a cinematic space through which viewers can manage traumatic and undesirable histories and ultimately reaffirm core "American" values" (2). Consequently, diverse incarnations of Mexican bandits in Westerns, drug trafficking films, urban gang films, and immigrant genre films, still prevail to configure values and ideas that are faithful to nationalistic discourses of the U.S.

In addition to the bandit image, another popular image should be discussed here. As the Pancho Villa candle and prayer card show below, Villa's particular incarnation in the folkloric and musical genre can be also accounted for in the context of folk religion or popular religion that pervades not only in the border area, but also in varying degree in the Latino communities.

10. See José Pablo Villalobos and Ramírez Pimentá's article, "Corridos and la pura verdad: Myths and Realities of the Mexican Ballad" for a detailed explanation about 'pure truth' embedded in corridos.

The fact that Villa has been recognized as a folk saint may seem odd from an informed perspective, even if we take into consideration the particularly pervasive characteristics of Mexican religiosity. As a border martyr,¹¹ Villa meets several demands that characterize this particular incarnation of belief. First, his sudden and violent death allows him to become a compassionate intercessor who was a victim himself. Second, the popular image of his utter fidelity to the poor makes petitioners pray not only for safely crossing the border, but also for a wide range of miracles about personal health, economic relief, and legal defense. Lastly, his unofficial sanctioning power, albeit as a social bandit, offers him legitimacy as an icon of resistance in a region that historically suffered a lack of official authorities. So his spiritual power is inextricably related to the multifaceted and precarious political, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions of the border region. Thus, even though Villa's sainthood can be argued as exceptional and situational, it undeniably fulfills the illusion for (and arguably of) social justice of the local devotees.



As long as border culture has increasingly exceeded the limitations of geographic proximity and spatial historicity, Villa's conventional images have experienced transformation as they adopted other identities, that of the politician or demagogue. Consequently, the demarcation between these polarized images, such as bandit and hero, has recently been blurred since the mainstream U.S. society as well as the Latino community consciously readopted Mexican rebellious imagery, displacing the previous stereotypes. Irrespective of discordant views of the powerful repercussion that the figure of Villa has had, his iconic significance is undeniable because a kitschy Chicano stereotype succeeds in entering and making a mark in the dominant U.S. culture. The recently reported news in the USA Today says

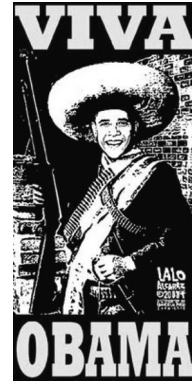
A terrorist in 1916, a tourist attraction in 2011. Villa's photo (often his Columbus police wanted poster) adorns countless cantinas and taquerias across the nation where he once was as reviled as bin Laden is now. He personifies daring, rebelliousness and a good time.¹²

11. On a closer look at the prayer card, it is affirmed that the petitioners devote their prayers to 'the martyr spirit of Pancho Villa'.

12. Hampson, Rick (2011) "Pancho Villa now celebrated in New Mexico", USA Today, http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2011-03-09-1Apanchovilla09_CV_N.htm – March 9th, 2011.

Of course, even though this comparison strikes us as deeply problematic than illustrative, it gives us a vague sense of how ambivalent, elusive, and even polarizing the figure of Villa has continued to be. Columbus, the city where Villa's raid took place in 1916, celebrates Villa's ride under the title "Cabalgata Binacional Villista", in which Mexican horse-riders follow Villa's invasion route crossing the border and parading into Columbus. The park named after Villa in this city is indeed contributing to boosting tourism and organizing the event for celebrating American-Mexican friendship. It can be argued that this dramatic change from terrorist to attractive rebel results from the reinterpretation of his banditry based on the re-adaptation of his iconic image to what is reclaimed as one of American currently most popular values: change.

Similarly, Villa's presence, especially in pop culture, yields far more numerous and nuanced sets of meaning these days. As Zapata's overlapped images with Obama, Villa is also reemployed for giving the friendly imagery of 'Jefe' to Obama.¹³ In the popular shopping site, zazzle, there is a logo called "PanchObama vote here" drawn by a cartoonist called Danyoura, whose products widely range from cups and tea-shirts to political posters and cards. The subtitle is 'Jefe border hunting for votes', whose intended customers are supposedly Chicanos or Latinos.



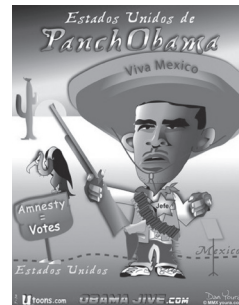
As the portrayal of Villa as hero or villain manifestly demonstrates, filmic and folkloric representations or discursive re-appropriations of border culture on both sides of the frontier have been conflictive and irreconcilable even though they share a common space and thus simulate a third space based on a reality of cultures that intersect in myriad ways. But historical mutability has recently registered the growing number of Latino communities and the increasing power of their political voices. As opposed to decreasing border traffic, the binary stereotypes of Villa's iconography are having an enduring dynamic dialogue, which is sustained by the increasingly prominent role undertaken by the Chicano/Latino community.

13. It is not hard to find a poster or picture under the titles such as 'Panch O bama' or 'Don Pancho bama' in the Internet.

Conclusion

“Villa’s reputation in America was fully restored. To the poor, he was a Robin Hood; to the Left, a freedom fighter; to the Right, a self-made man; to Hollywood, a swashbuckling matinee idol; to Mexican immigrants spreading across America, the general who’d bested Pershing”.¹⁴ What Rick Hampton’s words in the USA Today make plainly clear at once is how richly varied the signifier Pancho Villa has continued to be over the past many decades, and that even within the U.S. the figure of Villa is deployed for widely diverging purposes. All sectors mentioned deploy the iconic image of Villa to meet their needs and desires. As we conclude, I propose that, as the multiple sets of evidence show, Villa must be regarded not only as a floating signifier but also one that has been, necessarily, emptied out.

The purpose of this paper has not been to explore the competing meanings of the figure of Villa in Chicano culture or community. Instead, it examines how as an inter-American icon, Villa informs and problematizes the theoretical and cultural perspectives produced by border studies or the border paradigm. Throughout the paper, I tried to crystallize the insufficiencies as well as virtues of each category that has garnered a great deal of enduring academic interest. I have argued that the possibility of locating Villa in the nuanced and multilayered border paradigm reveals that the border framework is being reproduced and readjusted extensively and constantly to assimilate less the memory than the figure of Villa into Chicano life. At the same time, I have argued that the figural and symbolic repercussions of the historical Villa are entrapped by the particular dimensions, material and abstract, of the border region, which remains imbued with paradoxical and hierarchical tensions. We cannot ignore, however, the complex dialogue that continues between an iconic and kitschy Chicano stereotype and a US dominant figure of Villa based on a political rereading of him. Undoubtedly, the figure responds to a new phase of ideological changes in the U.S. society, in which the Chicano/Latino community has come to play an undeniably consequential role, particularly buttressed by shifting demographics. Because of the diverse signifying roles it undertakes, the figure of Villa can be read as a cartography of problematic traces, persistent conflicts and ongoing debates by manifesting himself as a popular icon, albeit for clearly different, even competing, purposes, for both the U.S mainstream society and the Chicano/Latino community.



14. Hampton, Rick, *Ibid.*

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