(B)ordering Texas: The Representation of Violence, Nationalism, and Masculine Archetypes in U.S.-Mexico Borderland Novels (1985-2012)

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DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By Joshua D. Martin

Lexington, Kentucky
Director: Dr. Susan Carvalho, Professor of Hispanic Studies

Lexington, Kentucky
2017

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

(B)ORDERING TEXAS: THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE, NATIONALISM, AND MASCULINITIES IN U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLAND NOVELS (1985-2012)

The present project explores the narrative construction of masculinities, violence, and nationalism in three U.S.-Mexico borderland novels written by U.S., Mexican, and Mexican-American writers: Caballero (1930s-40s, pub. 1996) by Jovita González and Eve Raleigh; Blood Meridian (1985) by Cormac McCarthy; and Texas: La gran ladronería en el lejano norte (2012) by Carmen Boullosa. Through the scope of masculinity, gender, and (post)colonial studies, this project examines how these authors incorporate hegemonic masculine archetypes and their attendant forms of violence (physical, economic, and epistemic) so as to interrogate claims to identity and national belonging along the Texas-Mexico border, against the backdrop of war and U.S. imperialism. In their roles as builders and/or defenders of an expanding nation-state, the male characters studied here enact distinct forms of violence in order to normalize their positions of power and further encode their claims to political and cultural hegemony. Considered together, the texts studied here demonstrate how the intersection of nationalism, masculinity construction, and particular forms of violence converge within an Anglo hegemonic masculinity to the detriment of Mexicans, non-white borderland individuals, and women--all of whom stand at the periphery of this imagined national (male) community.

Key words: U.S.-Mexico border, masculinities, violence, nationalism

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(B)ORDERING TEXAS: THE REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE, NATIONALISM, AND MASCULINITIES IN U.S.-MEXICO BORDERLAND NOVELS (1985-2012)

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For Ellen, Noah, and Rosalynd.
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Chapter One: Introduction

“The future is ours if we have the manhood to grasp it.”\(^1\)
- Theodore Roosevelt

I. Thesis

The present project explores the narrative construction of masculinities, violence, and nationalism in three U.S.-Mexico border novels written by U.S., Mexican, and Mexican-American writers. Taking place along the Texas-Mexico border during the mid-to-late nineteenth centuries, these novels include *Caballero* (1930s-40s, pub.1996) by Jovita González and Eve Raleigh; *Blood Meridian* (1985) by Cormac McCarthy; and *Texas: La gran ladronería en el lejano norte* (2012) by Carmen Boullosa. Employing insights by scholars of gender and masculinity, as well as (post)colonial theorists from both the United States and Latin America, this study will demonstrate that each of these three authors, in her or his own way, incorporates hegemonic masculine archetypes and their corollary forms of violence (physical, economic, and epistemic) in order to advance claims of nationalism and identity along the Texas-Mexico border, against the backdrop of war and U.S. imperialism. By analyzing these novels accordingly, this study does three things:

1.) First, it explores how the masculine figures represented by each novelist promote U.S. westward expansion and its concomitant violence against Mexicans through a cultural logic that reifies the nation state and its imagined Anglo body politic. These figures encode violent masculine performances that are deemed licit and normative within the context of nation building while simultaneously positing Mexicans as an antagonistic, racially othered opponent.

\(^1\) Quote obtained from Joane Nagel’s article “Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations” (251).
2.) In addition, this study explores how these archetypal Anglo male figures condone a set of exclusionary practices that foster male bonding and imagined homosocial communities by imbedding racialized nationalisms and their attendant axes of gendered power.

3.) Finally, this project demonstrates how the narrative techniques employed within each text interrogate and undermine these masculinist power dynamics by contesting the Anglo cultural and political hegemony in which they take root.

Through their configuration of male characters in a contested territory, these three writers demonstrate how the intersection of nationalism, race, and particular forms of violence within an Anglo hegemonic masculinity works to the detriment of Mexicans, non-white borderland dwellers, and women—all of whom stand at the periphery of this imagined national (male) community.²

The writing of these three novels spans roughly seven decades (from the 1930s and 1940s to the present), and the history represented in these novels ranges from the mid-nineteenth century, just before the 1848 signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the subsequent forfeiture of over half of Mexico’s national territory, to the beginning of the twentieth century, when U.S. agribusinesses in the Lower Rio Grande Valley had long since superseded Mexican haciendas, and when record U.S. investments in Mexico ($2 billion) were made at a time of increasing border violence, Mexican immigration, and expanding socioeconomic disparity between the two countries.³ In these three novels, I

² With regards to the border people of Mexican descent, Oscar J. Martínez remarks in his book *Troublesome Border* that “[t]he period from 1848 to 1920 was particularly difficult for the frontier Mexicans who had become part of the United States through annexation and for their compatriots who later immigrated from Mexico. These people became politically powerless, economically impotent, socially marginalized, racially stigmatized, and culturally maligned” (82)

³ In his book *Harvest of Empire*, investigative journalist Juan González writes that by 1908, the United States was consuming 80% of Mexico’s exports and supplying 66% of its imports, and that by the time
examine how these twentieth century authors reconstruct Anglo male codes that, as their
texts demonstrate, helped legitimize and advance the westward expansion of the United
States by foregrounding racialized violence within notions of autonomous manhood and
territorial-capital accumulation. As such, these novels thematize the processes by which
physical, economic, and epistemic violence against Mexicans and other non-white
borderland dwellers works to consolidate an imagined homosocial community of Anglo
men whose social and economic capital far outweighs that of their other(ed) borderland
counterparts. Even so, each author configures counter-hegemonic strategies in their
representations of Mexican women (González and Raleigh), characters of color
(Boullosa), and young white males (McCarthy). These characters ultimately challenge the
racialized nationalisms of the hegemonic Anglo men, while also exposing how race,
nationalism, and male-enacted violence intersect within a gendered social praxis along
the Texas-Mexico borderlands. By analyzing these texts accordingly, this project exposes
how these particular forms of sanctioned violence against women and characters of color
operate as normative practices that allow the Anglo male characters to construct
masculine identities, and attain hegemonic seats of power, in their roles as nation-
building-or-defending agents.

II. Selection of Texts and Outline of Project

While the cultural forces surrounding the authors of each text prove important in
this analysis, it is just as significant to recognize that the discourses and sociopolitical

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Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz was overthrown in 1920, the U.S. government had already invested $2
billion in Mexico (Harvest of Empire 52). Notable episodes of border violence include the “Plan de San
Diego” raids of 1915 and 1916, as well as the Santa Ysabel Massacre of 1916. Mexican immigration to the
United States increased steadily throughout the second decade of the twentieth century as a result of the
socioeconomic tumult incurred throughout Mexico during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) (see
chapter 4 of Oscar Martínez’s study Troublesome Border for a summary of notable episodes of nineteenth-
century borderlands violence).
forces that prompted the expansion of the United States’ southern border long predate the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-1848. Half a century earlier, for example, on November 24, 1801, then-U.S. President Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to James Monroe, affirming the necessity to, in his view, “look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand beyond those limits, and cover the whole northern if not the southern continent” (qtd. in González, Harvest of Empire 27). While the United States did not annex the southern continent of the Western hemisphere, it did manage within “distant times” (less than five decades) to fulfill the latent expectations of many nineteenth-century U.S. political leaders regarding westward expansion, a process that gained legitimacy through the ideological crux of Manifest Destiny, or what Juan González has termed “the nineteenth-century code-phrase for racial supremacy” (Harvest of Empire 28).

In 1846, forty-five years after Jefferson’s statement, the United States invaded Mexico, eventually forcing its southern neighbor to rescind its claim to what is now the Southwestern United States with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. In so doing, the United States augmented its area by 66 percent, and thereby fulfilled the expansionist aspirations of then-president James K. Polk who, in his war address to the U.S. Congress two years before, bemoaned what he regarded as the long history of Mexican anti-Anglo abuse by affirming, “The grievous wrongs perpetrated by Mexico upon our citizens ... remain unredressed” (qtd. in Byrnes, James K. Polk 257). In the same speech, Polk justified the invasion of Mexico by unilaterally highlighting the latter’s culpability: “As war exists, and, notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it,” he

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4 In his essay “National Initiatives,” Clyde A. Milner II claims the following: “By force of arms, the United States acquired its second trans-Mississippi West in less than half a century. The Mexican-American War fulfilled President Polk’s desires for expansion to the Pacific” (168).
assured, it “exists by the act of Mexico herself, [and] we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country” (257). Perhaps in no other region of the west than the borderlands have the “interests” of the United States most contentiously and violently manifested themselves—testifying to a “legacy of conquest,” to use historian Patricia Nelson Limerick’s phrase (Legacy of Conquest 18), spearheaded by Anglo men, that these three borderland authors narrativize from their respective subject positions.

In the century and a half since the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the U.S.-Mexico border has operated as a site of both symbolic and state power, often reinforcing the political and economic interests of the United States while at the same time abjecting Latino/as and Chicano/as through Anglo nationalistic discourse, racialized political policies, and asymmetrical trade legislation. In her study of border mestizo/a culture, feminist and border scholar Gloria Anzaldúa affirms that borders “are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them” (author’s emphasis, Borderlands 25). Commenting on the legacy of the illegal Anglo invasion of Texas in the mid 1800s, Anzaldúa identifies the U.S.-Mexico border as an open wound (“una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” 25) while a borderland, in her view, serves as “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (25). Anzaldúa’s view of the border as an interactional site of continuously contesting political and social forces strongly corresponds to what scholar Mary Louise Pratt terms a “contact zone”—a theoretical

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5 Commenting on Polk’s war address to Congress, historian William Earl Weeks affirms, “Polk’s war message reflects the self-serving logic of Manifest Destiny. In its tone and form it was reminiscent of John Quincy Adams’s ‘great gun’ of 1819 ... [Polk] cast the United States in the role of a long-aggrieved yet patient sufferer whose “cop of forbearance” had now finally been exhausted” (Building the Continental Empire 120).
model of colonial space and power upon which this study strongly relies. In Pratt’s own words, contact zones function as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Imperial Eyes 4). In response to the imperialist or colonial directives from which these spaces emerge, these contact zones, according to Pratt, evidence “the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (7). The complex and often contentious encounters that emanate from these contact zones thus create subjects “in and by their relations to each other ... [and through] copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (7). Through the prism of masculinity construction and against the backdrop of territorial expansion and land or capital accumulation, this project addresses these asymmetrical processes of exchange and interaction as they are represented in these three borderland narratives.

Spanning roughly 1,954 miles, the U.S.-Mexico border exists today as the most crossed international border in the world, and as such, both it and its adjacent borderlands have long garnered attention with respect to immigration and the economic, cultural, and linguistic exchanges between the two neighboring countries. Arguing that the borderlands were “carved in the midst of U.S. imperialism” (Border Matters 8), literary and cultural critic José David Saldívar contends that while the cultures of this contact zone “are historically constructed spaces of intercultural crossings” (72), they are also spaces “harboring ideology,” (77), with the long-term effect of “U.S. imperialism [operating] not only as territorial and economic fact but also inevitably as a subject-constituting project”
Indeed, in the past five decades, an interest in border studies has steadily grown in both cultural and literary circles, advanced in large part by the Chicano movement of the 1960s and the eponymous literary genre, and more recently by the increasing importance of the border region in the transnational economy linking Mexico and the United States. Critics and historians have correctly highlighted both the past and present convergences of Anglo, Mexican, Tejano, African-American, and Native American cultures within the borderlands. Few critics, though, have called attention to the construction of masculinities and how their ties to nationalism, race, and violence inform border narratives within Texas and along its border with Mexico.6

This project responds to the aforementioned absence in literary scholarship along the borderlands by analyzing specific forms of male-enacted violence and how they are advanced and sustained by Anglo male figures who function as nation-building-or-defending actors. In this regard, masculinity scholar R.W. Connell is correct to observe that “[l]oss of control at the frontier is a recurring theme in the history of empires, and is closely connected with the making of masculine exemplars” (*Masculinities* 187).

Building on this insight, this project examines how the gender performances of the male characters in these narratives converge with race, nationalism, and the compulsions toward land and capital accumulation. From these imperatives, the male characters advance claims to both individual and collective (national) identity along the Texas-Mexico borderlands—a contested space that, to again use Anzaldúa’s words, “has

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6The choice of Texas by these writers is not without historical precedent. Arguing that a “cluster of beliefs mentally programmed westerners to commit violence” (“Violence” 393), historian Richard Maxwell Brown argues that “[n]o region of the West was more violent than central Texas from 1860 to the 1890s”—a fact he correlates with the dominance of five principal socio-political codes that legitimated and advanced violence in the post-war period: “the doctrine of no duty to retreat; the imperative of personal self-redress; the homestead ethic; the ethic of individual enterprise; the Code of the West; and the ideology of vigilantism” (“Violence” 422, 393).
survived Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, [and] pillage” in addition to “possession and ill-use by five countries: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the U.S., the Confederacy, and the U.S. again” (Borderlands 112). It is the final acquisition in Anzaldúa’s list that forms the historical backdrop of the texts studied here.

In addition to securing the modern-day Southwest as United States territory, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) also incorporated approximately 100,000 Mexican nationals as U.S. citizens (Martínez, Troublesome Border 80). This legal mandate would prove increasingly problematic throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as shifting racial politics altered conceptions of legitimate citizenship at both the local and national levels. In addition to questions of race and citizenship, other issues including immigration, bilingual education, poverty, and drug trafficking, have also informed relations between Anglos and non-Anglos in complex ways. Since the signing of Guadalupe Hidalgo, an impressive number of writers from both sides of the physical border have grappled with the asymmetrical power relations regarding race, gender, economic distribution, and epistemic hegemony, all of which have crosscut the borderlands in diverse ways from the Lower Rio Grande Valley to Tijuana-San Diego. Just as the borderlands today defy simple dichotomies in terms of racial makeup and cultural uniformity, so too do the individual subject positions of borderland writers inform their representations of the struggles that have characterized the region since the signing of the aforementioned treaty.

Throughout the twentieth century, a number of writers--U.S., Chicano/a, Mexican, or otherwise--have written about the borderlands across genres and with regards to a panoply of themes, including feminism and hybrid consciousness (Gloria
Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Norma Alarcón), war and politics (Benjamin Alire Sáenz, Rolando Hinojosa Smith, Aristeo Brito), coming of age and sexuality (Sandra Cisneros, Rudolfo Anaya, Ana Castillo), personal memoir (Norma Elia Cantú, Gloria López-Stafford, Richard Rodriguez), and migrant work and immigration (Tomás Rivera, Luis Alberto Urrea, Luis Humberto Crosthwaite), among many others. While the colonial legacy of the nineteenth century informs, if only peripherally, the texts of several of the foregoing writers, few have directly incorporated in their fiction the historical backdrop of Manifest Destiny and the complex intersections of race, masculinity, and nationalism that informed the United States’ territorial acquisition during this period.

Since the advent of Chicano literature in the 1960s and 70s, several of the aforementioned writers have attracted the attention of scholars from a number of disciplines. Still, few have addressed the region’s longstanding colonial legacy in terms of masculinity construction and how allocations of power operate within a logic of Anglo nationalism, racial stratification, and land or capital accumulation. This study responds to that void by examining three novels by authors who write either from the Mexican side of the border (Boullosa), the U.S. side (McCarthy), or along the border itself (González). I have chosen these particular texts because of their diegetic unity and shared themes of nationalism, gendered violence, and racialized discourses. More importantly, though, the ways in which each author represents the construction of masculinities varies in important ways depending upon the historical backdrop of the author and the understandings of race and nationalism relative to those particular historical periods.

The historical contexts of the novels I have chosen to include in this project span a period of roughly sixty years along the Texas-Mexico border from the mid nineteenth-
century to the beginning of the twentieth-century. The author(s) of each text began the writing of his or her novel at a distinct period in the twentieth-century, with nearly eight decades separating the writing or publication of the earliest text (González and Raleigh, 1930s-40s) from the most recent (Boullosa, 2012). As such, this project considers two distinct historical trajectories: that of the stories and that of the storytellers.

This study could be constructed according to either of these timelines. The first option would involve analyzing the struggles regarding identity construction along the border according to the intradiegetic time frames described in each novel. Structured as such, this project would begin with Blood Meridian (McCarthy, 1848-early 1850s), followed by Caballero (González and Raleigh, early 1850s), and ending with Texas: La gran ladronería en el lejano norte (Boullosa, late 1850s and early 1860s). This approach would prioritize the setting and how these three writers represent the historical evolution of masculinist power and cross-cultural conflict along the U.S.-Mexico border. This option would not presuppose that historicism dominates textual interpretation or, conversely, that writers operate free from the demands of their own historically specific social and political junctures. This method of organization might, however, give priority to textual content and its representation of the border region’s cultural progression from the mid nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.

I have chosen, however, to organize this project in accordance with the novels’ publication dates, in order to give more nuanced attention to the writers’ cultural contexts and how their representations of violence, nationalism, and masculinity emerge from the three distinct periods of border history within which these writers conceive their texts: the

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7 Scholars such as José Limon and María Cotera posit a time frame of 1930s-1940s for the initial composition of Caballero (“Editors’ Acknowledgements” xi).
Customs Era (1920s-1980s: González and Raleigh), the Law Enforcement Era (1980s-2001: McCarthy), and the National Security Border (2001-present: Boullosa). Since *Caballero* (pub. 1996) by González and Raleigh is believed by many to have been written during the 1930s or early 1940s, this text will serve as the first case study, followed by McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* (1985), and finally Boullosa’s *Texas: La gran ladronería en el lejano norte* (2012). While novels do not necessarily function as reflections of an author’s life or circumstance, they nonetheless can and oftentimes do draw from the overarching social and political dynamics that surround an author during the production of her or his text. Consider, for example, that the geographic specificity of the U.S.-Mexico border was far from settled when the first of these three novels was written. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) specified the Rio Grande as the official border between Texas and Mexico, natural phenomena such as erosion and flooding continuously altered the river itself, and as a result, the official border between both countries remained contested. In fact, it was not until 1970 that a binational treaty resolved a series of lingering land disputes between the two countries near the Lower Rio Grande Valley—a process that culminated in the official demarcation of the Texas-Mexico border, approximately 120 years after Guadalupe Hidalgo. Furthermore, it has only been in recent decades that the gendered nature of the U.S.-Mexico borderland power structures have begun to garner significant attention from writers, social scientists, and political activists. Each of the works I examine operates under distinct historical and

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8 Political scientist Tony Payan divides the history of the border throughout the twentieth-century in these terms. For more information, see chapter 1 of his book *The Three U.S.-Mexico Border Wars: Drugs, Immigration, and Homeland Security*.

9 In this regard, I concur with Chicano literary scholar José Ramón Saldívar, who argues, “Narratives, in sum, are preeminently and rigorously dialectical. Like the ideologies that they articulate, narratives both figure and are determined by their social context” (“Narrative, Ideology” 13)

10 Oscar J. Martínez explores this treaty in depth, as well as the numerous other border disputes between the two countries, in his book, *Troublesome Border*.
social contingencies that affect the production of these novels, their representations of borderland masculinities, and the power dynamics in which these gendered prerogatives operate. Organizing the novels accordingly thus allows an examination of the texts’ narrative content with more critical attention devoted to the distinct social contexts from which these texts emerge.

Jovita González and Eve Raleigh’s *Caballero* thematizes Anglo-Mexican heterosexual love as a foundational mechanisms to abridge border antagonisms between these two groups shortly after Mexico’s 1848 territorial concessions. Unlike the other texts studied here, *Caballero* centers upon, and later offsets, the primacy of Mexican patriarchy following the arrival of the Anglo men, who occupy ambivalent positions as both imperial actors (in the view of Mexican men) and emancipatory agents (in the view of Mexican women). Additionally, *Caballero* explores the effects of competing Anglo and Mexican masculine nationalisms on both the Mexican men and women who struggle to uphold the male-policing code of family honor. McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*, meanwhile, draws upon the racial logic that informed the United States’ westward expansion, qualifying violence against Mexicans and Native Americans as corollaries to male performance, national defense, and economic profit. Taking place shortly before and after the signing of Guadalupe Hidalgo, *Blood Meridian* posits physical and epistemic violence within the modern-day borderlands as normative, and oftentimes compulsory, expressions Anglo masculinity. Boullosa’s *Texas: La gran ladronería en el lejano norte* engages in these intercultural confrontations as well, though unlike the two aforementioned novels, this narrative problematizes Anglo male hegemony altogether by
privileging the actions of the seemingly subjugated Mexican(-American) male and female characters in their quest for cultural legitimation and territorial reacquisition.

III. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

III.A. Overview

While gender categories have existed since time immemorial, the study of masculinities as a separate and viable category in Western scholarship traces its beginnings to the late 1960s and early 1970s, inspired in part by second-wave feminism and other contemporaneous movements that addressed a number of social inequalities. Perhaps in response to those theorists’ accusations, the 1980s witnessed the rise of the Mythopoetic men’s movement, with its followers’ emphasis on the recuperation of a supposed inner masculine essence by carefully adhering to the ideas of Robert Blythe, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell, among others. The fact that gender categories have existed for millennia, however, does not guarantee a uniform understanding of gender (or identity) across space and time. The critical schools that emerged during and after the 1970s in particular have interrogated the claim central to Western philosophy that a supposedly centered and homogenous “I” lies at the heart of an individual’s identity. Postcolonial and gender studies in particular have examined the social processes that inform identity construction, questioning essentialist claims concerning identity and gender by focusing attention instead on the many axes—such as race, class, sexuality, and location—that intersect with the construction and performances of gender codes and the identities that they inform. In doing so, scholars from both fields have sought to demonstrate how the convergence of social and discursive mechanisms produce, rather

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11 R.W. Connell observes that gender relations “form one of the major structures of all documented societies” (*Masculinities* 72).
than merely reflect, a subject’s “masculinity” or “femininity,” as well as the processes of accountability that emerge alongside these specific identifications.

My analysis demonstrates that throughout these three border narratives, this convergence both reflects and reinforces imagined Anglo fraternities and the territorial expansion or capitalist accumulation that a shared racialized nationalism demands of the male characters as nation-building-or-defending agents. Even so, the characters of color throughout these texts contest the Anglo males’ attempts to retain power in the borderlands through counterhegemonic strategies of resistance. Regardless of the characters’ racial backgrounds and national allegiances, all of the male characters studied here perform masculine codes in ways that affirm particular claims to individual identity and collective national belonging, thereby reflecting the observation of feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe that nationalisms have “typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (*Bananas, Beaches, and Bases* 44). The question as to how these identity markers and compulsions form alongside the construction of masculinities thus demands further critical attention.

**III.B. Identity, Gender, and Performance**

In his essay “Who Needs Identity Anyway?,” cultural theorist Stuart Hall, drawing heavily from French philosopher Michel Foucault, argues that identities develop through discursive matrices and “emerge within the play of specific modalities of power” (4). Far from acting as originary or monolithic ideals, identities, according to Hall, draw upon the “endlessly performative” nature pursuant to discourse, while at the same time respecting the “specific historical and institutional sites” from which individual
subjectivities can and do emerge (1, 4). To this end Hall, referencing Judith Butler, notes the gender dynamics implicit in these claims and adds that identities, like gender categories, “operate through exclusion ... [as well as through] the production of abjected and marginalized subjects” (15). Hall’s commentary on bodily demonstrations of identity correctly highlights how the exclusionary effects of gendered performances undergird the construction of social identities—an observation that has not evaded the attention of gender scholar, Judith Butler.

By drawing upon Foucault’s vision of power and discourse in addition to Simone de Beauvoir’s observation that “[o]ne is not born a woman, but becomes one,” Butler disavows gender binaries since, in her view, such divisions circumvent the dynamism of all gender codes and the fluid social axes along which both masculinities and femininities operate. In her book *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, for example, Butler contends that gender entails “the bodying of norms [as] a compulsory practice” and that such norms function “by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity” (231). Furthermore, in her essay “Imitation and Gender Subordination,” Butler calls attention to the repeated mimetic practices that converge with social conventions and institutions that, in turn, create the impression of an autonomous individual and his or her supposedly natural gender comportment:

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12 Hall further elaborates his argument by affirming that “identities are never unified” and “never singular” and instead are “constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (4).
13 In her study entitled *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir states the following, “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figures that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is the female” (238).
14 In her landmark study *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler defines gender as Butler defines gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (43-4).
The very possibility of becoming a viable subject requires that a certain gender mime be already underway. The ‘being’ of the subject is no more self-identical that the ‘being’ of any gender; in fact, coherent gender, achieved through an apparent repetition of the same, produces as its effect the illusion of a prior and volitional subject. In this sense, gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express. (134)

Understood accordingly, a gender epistemology based on biological dimorphism (male / female) and heterosexual complementarity relies upon a logic that privileges heterosexuality as normative and which, in turn, espouses a twofold vision of “natural” genders that are either male or female (Bodies That Matter 13-15). Readers of these three borderland novels are forced, then, to consider how normative gender regimes are maintained, in addition to how they inform and advance cultural and national identifications through different and often strategic forms of male-enacted violence. In each of these texts, the male characters perform masculine scripts in ways that reify the nation-state that they simultaneously work to construct and/or defend. Even so, other characters--primarily women and individuals of color--interrogate, and attempt to offset, the primacy of the Anglo males’ social, economic, and epistemic hegemony along the Texas-Mexico border. In each text, the transgression of these gendered prerogatives advances a narrative tension that forces readers to consider the forms of exclusion and violence in which these male scripts take root. In order to better understand how these male characters construct individual (masculine) and collective (national) identities against the backdrop of territorial and capitalist expansion, this project also considers the
processes of exclusion and abjection that allow these men to consolidate these particular forms of identification and camaraderie.

**III.C. Exclusion and Abjection**

In Butler’s theoretical framework, exclusion operates as a key mechanism, both for its symbolic value in maintaining social and gender identities as well as its ability to structure the social relations that reflect these identity markers. Much like Hall, Butler correctly relates the exclusionary logic of all gender codes to larger cultural frameworks, arguing that exclusion and repudiation determine how subjects identify themselves within a particular cultural paradigm (*Bodies That Matter* 8). By understanding gender as an effect-based social category, readers of these borderland novels are better equipped to identify the hierarchies and social conventions that limit the agency of a given character and her or his ability (or inability) to embody pre-approved modes of behavior. In this respect, performative theory affirms the temporal, social, and historical contingencies that regulate the purported normativity of both male and female gender codes. The repeated plays of these policed gender strictures feign normativity, at the same time that they compel men and women to execute socially palatable behaviors in order to obtain group acceptance and social inclusion. In turn, identity construction is configured as a continuous, effect-based process that emerges from social discourses and the polyvalent power structures that police licit sexuality and desire. Each of these three borderland texts represent political, social, and economic structures that codify normative regimes of gendered behavior, which in turn regulate and encode what is masculine or feminine licit in contradistinction to performances or desires considered masculine or feminine illicit. The Anglo male characters in these narratives construct masculine identities through
compulsory, and often strategic, forms of sanctioned violence, but their gender performances also reflect tensions and reconstitute national identifications as they establish, cross, or defend the geographical border separating the ever-expanding United States from the recently defeated Mexico.

III.D. Geographical Borders as Catalysts for Identity Markers

Just as historically contingent and culturally variable social borders demarcate what are considered the proper boundaries of gender performance, so too do geographical markers reflect and reinforce claims to national identity, often through the application of individual or state-sanctioned violence. Along these lines, scholar Yosef Lapid correctly argues that nation-state borders “are in many ways inseparable from the identities they help demarcate or individuate” (“Now and Then, Here and There” 7), and cultural anthropologist Olivia T. Ruiz Marrujo make similar insights, arguing that “[b]ecause of the tension involved in determining who is ‘native’ and who is ‘foreign’ ... borders are neuralgic centers of vigilance, exclusion, coercion, and control, and by extension, places of explicit and latent violence” (“Women, Migration, and Sexual Violence” 39). Charged with its long history of territorial contestation, interracial violence, and economic disparity, the U.S.-Mexico border operates throughout these.

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15 See also chapter 7 of the book Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the ‘Illegal Alien’ and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary, by geographer Joseph Nevins, who claims, “Territorial boundaries are inextricably related to the construction of social boundaries, the parameters that define specific social groups on both sides of the geographical divide” (151). In their book chapter concerning globalization and the U.S.-Mexico border, political scientist Kathleen Staudt and sociologist David Spener echo a similar finding, maintaining that “borders and boundary-making processes [are] essential to human cognition and communication” and are also fundamental to the division of labor, group solidarity, and national identification (“The View from the Frontier: Theoretical Perspectives Undisciplined” 9-13).

16 In their book chapter “Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History,” historians William Cronon and George Miles, alongside curator Jay Gitlin, privilege state formation as a harbinger for collective identity, arguing that “all social life is in some sense a struggle to define the difference between ours and theirs, mine and yours, self and other. But the most clear-cut of social boundaries came into being through a ... process that defines the transition from frontier to region more precisely than any other: state forming” (authors’ emphasis 16).
narratives as a physical site of exclusion between the citizens of two nation-states, yet it also functions, to borrow from Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, as a place of “cultural production” and a symbolic space of “meaning-making and meaning-breaking” as dominant masculine codes are performed, interrogated, and contested (Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State 64). This project gauges the U.S.-Mexico border along these lines, exploring how the region augments national affect and legitimizes collective national identities by symbolically reifying imagined (male) communities.

Scholars have noted the ubiquitous violence that informed both U.S. westward expansion and the changing boundary of the U.S.-Mexico border, yet few have explored in borderland narratives the integration of such violence against the backdrop of masculinity performance. This study confronts how the cultural and discursive mechanisms in these texts legitimize, encode, and normalize forms of male-enacted violence against non-Anglos in the context of nation-building and land-capital accumulation. The novelists whose selected works form the basis of this study confront these phenomena in unique ways. In order to approach the differences separating these writers, further theoretical orientation is needed in order better understand how each represents masculinity construction.

III.E. Defining Masculinities

If gender is in fact, as Butler has argued, the effect of repeated practices that dissimulate normativity by means of their very repetition, we must ask what, then, are masculinities? In her book examining the construction of masculinities, R.W. Connell argues that masculinity “is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these
practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (*Masculinities* 71).\(^{17}\) According to Connell, a given masculinity “is simultaneously positioned in a number of structures of relationship, which may be following different historical trajectories” (73).\(^{18}\) Just as “[t]he control of space is an integral part of power relations” as geographer Joseph Nevins claims (*Operation Gatekeeper* 162), it is equally true that power factors prominently into the performance of male codes, as the U.S.-Mexico border has certainly made evident. Sociologist James W. Messerschmidt affirms that “when we think about gender in terms of power relations, it becomes necessary to study the powerful (men) because, as with any structure of power and inequality (such as race and class), it matters to study the powerful” (*Nine Lives* 2). Power, in Messerschmidt’s view, “is a relationship that structures social interaction not only between men and women but among men (and among women) as well,” thereby reflecting “one’s position in social relationships” (9). The borderlands of the U.S. and Mexico in these texts highlight the intersectionality of distinct cultures and languages, but they also force a reckoning of political and social consciousness, of the type that often disadvantages minority groups. Close readers will notice that this borderland-based exploitation directly converges with notions of masculine power and performance—a fact that led Gloria Anzaldúa to argue that “[m]en, even more than women, are fettered to gender roles ... We need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement” (*Borderlands* 106). Thus, the question looms as to how the male characters in these three texts manage physical, epistemic, and economic

\(^{17}\) In his book *The Men and the Boys*, Connell defines gender as “a way in which social practice is ordered,” adding that “body-reflexive practices such as labour, violence, sexuality and self-interpretation” reflect overarching schemas of gendered social orders (58-9).

\(^{18}\) Historian Gail Bederman details a series of important differences between the terms “manliness” and “masculine” / “masculinity.” The former, Bederman argues, denoted autonomy, high-mindedness, and honor, whereas the latter terms were applied to refer to “any characteristics, good or bad, that all men had” (*Manliness & Civilization* 18). Bederman notes that by 1930, ‘masculinity’ came to be associated with “ideals like aggressiveness, physical force, and male sexuality” (19).
violence as forms of social praxis and gendered knowledge, as well as why these characters inflict these particular forms of violence against certain groups of individuals.

III.F. Forms of Violence as Legitimate and Legitimizing Masculine Resources

In his book *Sex, Violence and Power in Sports*, sociologist Michael Messner considers similar questions, arguing that a multiplicity of social phenomena often condition men to understand violence as a legitimate and legitimizing masculine resource that might likewise work to advance or preserve their claims to social capital:

Men use the threat or application of violence to maintain their political power and economic advantage over women. Male socialization reflects and reinforces this larger pattern of male dominance. As boys come to accept the male-dominated status quo, they internalize its concomitant cultural images of the angry and violence-prone prototypical man. Many male subcultures ... are vehicles for transmitting these masculine norms, and, as such, do much to equate demonstrations of violence and anger with manhood. (71-2)

Messner’s accurate connection of male socialization with the codification of masculine scripts reinforces the claims, such as those of Eve Sedgwick (*Between Men* 1-7) and Michael Kimmel (*Manhood in America* 7), that homosociality informs the construction and performance of masculine codes.

Connell has also taken note of these phenomena, developing a theoretical model that she terms “hegemonic masculinity” to account for men’s idealization of, and the ensuing compulsion to emulate, a given masculine script in a specific socio-historical setting. Arguing that “in a particular social formation, certain masculinities are more dominant, more valued, or more persuasive than others” (*Masculinities* 170), Connell
contends, “‘Hegemonic masculinity’ is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable” (76). Just as other scholars, including Messner (Sex, Violence, and Power in Sports 71-2), Chodorow (“The Enemy Outside” 245-50), and Gilligan (“Culture, Gender, and Violence” 543-45) correlate the codified violence of gender codes with larger cultural praxes, Connell asserts that these same cultural frameworks both constitute, mirror, and reinforce site-specific hegemonic masculinities. In this view, hegemony “is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual ... It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority)” (Connell Masculinities 77). This study approaches the male-enacted forms of violence in these border narratives as mechanisms that position one male code above all others, with the subsequent effect of structuring the intersubjective relationships of all characters against the backdrop of nationalism, race, and territorial or capital accumulation.

III.G. The Intersection of Masculinities, Violence, and Territorial-Capitalist Expansion

In recent years, a growing number of historians have studied the intersection of masculinities, violence, and territorial expansion. In her book Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire, for example, historian Amy S. Greenberg affirms that “[t]he consolidation of national identity and the internal American categories of race,
class, and gender occurred in a framework of expansionism and imperial domination” (15). According to Greenberg, understandings of race and gender informed Manifest Destiny, in such a way that the phenomenon reflected back and conditioned both of these social categories from the mid nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century: “discourse of aggressive expansionism dominated the discussion of America’s proper role in the world,” Greenberg contends, adding that the widespread phenomena of male-enacted violence and the nearly ubiquitous belief among white men in the alleged superiority of an Anglo-Saxon race worked to construct a “[h]egemonic American masculinity” which, she argues, “was actually made manifest through the process of antebellum territorial expansionism” (17). The typical Anglo male who partook in westward expansion, according to Greenberg, managed to “reify [his] masculine virtues through aggressive expansionism” (17) and was able to participate “by [virtue of] his uniform, military status, and Anglo-Saxon racial identity” in the “regeneration, through violence, of both the new frontier and himself” (151). Greenberg is not alone in her comments regarding the productive nature of male violence to both masculinity construction and Anglo nationalism.20

If the west operated, as Kimmel (Manhood in America 60) and Greenberg (Manifest Manhood 20-22) assert, as a safety-valve for many nineteenth century men in the U.S., historian Fredrick B. Pike insists that these same men largely constructed their

20 Greenberg argues that by 1848 “two preeminent and dueling mid-century masculinities [had emerged]: restrained manhood and martial manhood. Restrained manhood was practiced by men in the North and South who grounded their identities in their families, in the evangelical practice of their Protestant faith, and in success in the business world. Their masculine practices valued expertise. Restrained men were strong proponents of domesticity or ‘true womanhood.’ They believed that the domestic household was the moral center of the world” (Manifest Manhood 10). Martial men, however, were often supporters of the Democratic Party who drank to excess, valued physical strength, were aggressive and violent, and eschewed the civilizing strictures of urban society. According to Greenberg, martial men were drawn to the frontier “where strength, will, and bravery counted for more than a good appearance” (10).
masculinities through processes of violence and the symbolic rebirth that these operations entailed:

American men ... have tended simultaneously to pine for rebirth through an idealized eternal feminine ... American men have attributed their vaunted uniqueness to the most abundant supply among all civilized nations of an untapped natural wilderness that, of course, they feminized ... [N]ature could redeem only those men who after having surrendered to her then directed their born-again energies toward her ultimate pacification and conquest. In this process American manhood fulfilled its calling and assured the onward march of civilization. (The United States and Latin America 14)

Accordingly, this study explores how, in these borderland texts, specific forms of violence inform the construction and performance of masculine codes while legitimizing the cultural (male-dominated) frameworks in which they operate.

While we have stressed violence as a masculine resource, we must also specify its particular manifestations and how each arises within the borderland novels studied here. I argue that male-enacted violence throughout these narratives emerges in three variants—physical, economic, and epistemic—and that these different configurations cohere imagined fraternal communities that operate within a cultural logic of Anglo supremacy and territorial-capitalist expansion. Occurring in the mid to late 1800s, these three texts attest to what historian Joe B. Frantz terms the “more spectacular” violence that

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21 Scholar David Pugh makes a similar point in his study Sons of Liberty by arguing “Civilization, like genuine heterosexuality, threatened male autonomy, something the rugged individual could not stand for, and so he fled ... The West represented undefiled democracy, and unfeminized and, therefore, uncivilized, nondomesticated equality that men could exercise in pursuit of wealth and autonomy. It was their last, best hope” (60)

22 In her book Borderlands / La frontera, Gloria Anzaldúa makes the important observation that men have largely been viewed as the architects of culture (38-9).
dominated the borderlands during the mid nineteenth century (“The Borderlands” 41) by thematizing cultural conflict and inter-racial violence against the backdrop of westward expansion and masculinized nationalisms.

In addition to its representation of physical violence, McCarthy’s Blood Meridian also narrativizes an evolution in the management of male-enacted violence under the guise of three hegemonic archetypes. Each of these male leaders employs racialized nationalism, economic necessity, or scientific rationalism to preserve their respective claims to power and to normalize their atrocities within the logic of Manifest Destiny. The imagery of the text’s ambiguous epilogue suggests the advent of Anglo-led capitalism, thus ensuring the perpetuation of this longstanding legacy of conquest in the borderlands. Both González and Raleigh’s Caballero and Boullosa’s Texas more directly engage the economic forms of violence in the Texas-Mexico borderlands, but they do so in very different ways. González and Raleigh, for example, fetter questions of legitimate citizenship to whiteness and capitalist entrepreneurialism—a process that ensures greater, albeit limited, autonomy for the Mexican female characters who marry Anglo men. The Mexican men who refuse, or cannot adapt to, this new socioeconomic order suffer increasing marginalization as their patriarchal cultural strongholds give way to Anglo-pioneered capitalism. Written nearly eight decades later, Boullosa’s Texas more directly engages male-enacted violence in both economic and epistemic terms. The text’s hegemonic male presence, Charles Stealman, maintains economic domination over the Lower Rio Grande Valley, accumulating land and capital at the expense of his Mexican(-American) counterparts who lack the legal resources to counter this operation. The novel’s fragmentation, use of heteroglossia, and privileging of numerous female
characters foreground male-enacted violence as endemic to the moral calculus of Stealman’s capitalist enterprise.

Understood accordingly, these manifestations of male-enacted violence operate throughout these narratives as resources that are both legitimizing, in that they work to qualify men as “man enough”, and transactional, in that they serve as gendered resources for the perpetuation of dominant male codes. In doing so, they also allow these male characters to assert or foreground individual identities, racial markers, and claims of national belonging in a contested territory. As both an effect and a constituting factor of social hierarchies, these forms of violence function here as resources that demarcate, however falsely, the boundaries between “citizen” and “foreigner,” “man” and “(feminine) other”. Such dichotomies likewise force readers to question how the strategic uses of these forms of violence against the latter fortify the homosocial bonds of the former. The disparaging, if not entirely racist, discourses regarding Mexicans and Mexican-Americans that these historically themed novels represent is not, of course, without historical precedent.

III.H. Orders through Borders: Changing Perceptions of the U.S.-Mexico Border

In an editorial to the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1846, U.S. poet Walt Whitman, author of such poems as the celebratory “I Hear America Singing,” echoed the sentiments of many of his compatriots at large when he asked, “What has miserable, inefficient Mexico--with her superstition, her burlesque upon freedom, her actual tyranny by the few over the many--what has she to do with the great mission of peopling the new world with a noble race? Be it ours, to achieve that mission!” (qtd. in Erkkila, “Whitman and
American Empire” 59). Whitman was not alone. Anti-Mexican bias in the United States pervaded local and national discourses throughout, and well beyond, the nineteenth century, especially in regards to the supposed civilizing role of the United States on a global scale. Predating Whitman’s comments by twenty-eight years, Democratic Senator Thomas Hart Benton identified Anglo American men as “the children of Adam,” arguing that they “obey the same impulse—that of going to the West; which, from the beginning of time has been the course of heavenly bodies, of the human race, and of science, and national power following in their train” (qtd. in Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny 90). Benton’s correlation of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism and providential favoritism, on the one hand, with scientific progress and national power, on the other, speaks to the dominant Anglo nationalisms that sanctioned territorial expansion and catalyzed its concomitant violence against people of color.

Shortly afterwards, in the late 1820s, U.S. diplomat Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first U.S. Minister to Mexico, identified Mexicans as “an ignorant and immoral race” whose miscegenation relegated them “to the very lowest class of human beings” (qtd. in Schoultz, Beneath the United States 19). The racialized hierarchies symptomatic of

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23 In his book The Forging of the American Empire, Sidney Lens argues that other writers sympathizes with Whitman’s expansionist aspirations, including William Cullen Bryant, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and historian George Bancroft (101). According to Lens, Whitman “considered such expansion not as an intrinsic evil but as a reform. It was a measure to ease the pain of depression by offering haven to defeated farmers” (101).

24 The racialized postulates of nineteenth century scientists are many and worked to advance the already deeply rooted notions of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism. Amy S. Greenburg, for one, argues that such theories converged directly with masculinity construction: “While the large-headed American was destined to prevail, aggressiveness and a war-like nature also was predetermined, the result of brain size. Ultimately, ethnology claimed, a war-like nature was a positive, indeed crucial, characteristic for the race. In this manner, popular science supported a martial vision of Anglo-Saxon manhood at the expense of restrained manhood” (Manifest Manhood 93).

25 Poinsett attempted in his 1825 discussions with Mexican President Iturbide to fix the U.S.-Mexico border in such a way that New Mexico, California, Coahuila, Sonora, Baja California, and sections of Nuevo León could be easily transferred to the United States (Martínez Troublesome Border 12). In the same year, then Secretary of State Henry Clay instructed Poinsett to demand from Mexico a river boundary west of the
nineteenth century Anglo ideology also converged with the notion that the United States, because of the allegedly superior racial pedigree of its body politic, would easily acquire contested borderland territory even in the face of Mexican opposition, or as Sam Houston argued: “Now the Mexicans are no better than Indians, and I see no reason why we should not go on in the same course now, and take their land” (qtd. in Greenburg, *Manifest Manhood* 106). Such sentiments were not unique. Consider lastly the comments of then Secretary of State James Buchanan who, in 1844, spoke on the matter of reclaiming the Republic of Texas by decrying Mexicans’ alleged racial inferiority and affirming that “Anglo Saxon blood could never be subdued by anything that claimed Mexican origin” (qtd. in Foley, *The White Scourge* 20). While the three authors studied here write their works during distinct periods of border history in the twentieth century (see page 8), the diegetic setting for each of their novels takes place during what Tony Payan terms “the frontier era” (1848-1910) of border history, a period characterized by “weak ties to centralized authority” and an absence of “border bureaucracies,” during which border-crossers (both human and livestock) were largely “free to roam back and forth without impediments” (*The Three U.S.-Mexican Border Wars* 6-7). In spite of these lax constraints regarding Mexican mobility, anti-Mexican tropes pervaded local and national discourse, abjecting non-white borderland residents as individuals whose racial miscegenation and alleged cultural retrograde threatened Anglo society. The borderland novels studied throughout this project thematize these nineteenth-century racialized nationalisms by interrogating hegemonic Anglo masculinities that compel men to

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Sabine River--a process that would begin in 1829 under President Andrew Jackson. An ultra nationalist, Poinsett would later serve as Secretary of War under President Martin Van Buren, during which time he increased the army by 33% and inspired the term *Poinsettismo* in Mexico after meddling in the country’s affairs. Poinsett offered to buy Texas from Mexico in 1827 and 1829. Mexico refused to sell the territory on both occasions (Burciaga, *Drink Cultura* 43-44).
undertake forms of violence against characters of color in their roles as nation builders or defenders.

The theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity paired with the postcolonial models regarding power and identity-formation studied here, aids in this discussion by exploring the cultural praxes and discursive mechanisms that establish and promote Anglo hegemonic masculinities. As Connell has argued, “hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual,” such that “[i]t is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority)” (*Masculinities* 77). Regarding the latter, Messerschmidt maintains that oftentimes a given hegemonic masculinity “normalizes and legitimizes” the use of violence as a means of proper masculine performance: “Because of its connection to hegemonic masculinity, for many men violence serves as a suitable resource for constructing masculinity ... This acceptance of violence as a means of doing masculinity effectively predisposes such individuals toward violence, providing a resource for affirming a particular type of masculinity” (*Nine Lives* 12). The texts chosen for this study represent violence as physical, economic, and epistemic. Central to understanding the theoretical frameworks that this study employs are the notions of self-made man autonomy and imagined communities. The Anglo male characters studied here construct masculine identities in relation to hegemonic male models while also grappling with economic and cultural imperatives to demonstrate their autonomy and national

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26 Along these lines, Messerschmidt signals the pragmatic and functional value of violence in male circles. Hegemonic masculinities, according to Messerschmidt, are “culturally honored, glorified, and extolled at the symbolic level and through practice”, thereby advancing “practices toward authority, control, independence, competitive individualism, aggressiveness, and the capacity for violence” (*Nine Lives* 10)
allegiance as nation-building-or-defending actors. This section will conclude with a brief exposition of these key models and their relation to the present project.

**III.I. Masculinities, Homosociality, and Self-Made Man Autonomy**

As we have argued, the U.S.-Mexico border functions as a physical site demarcating the boundaries of two nation-states while also reinforcing the legitimacy of national imagined communities through both its symbolic and lived practices of exclusion. The narrative representations of such ubiquitous border violence practiced and reproduced by the male characters in these novels highlight the communal value of behaviors deemed masculine normative, but they also emphasize the negative effects that these gendered behaviors entail for non-Anglo characters. The three novels analyzed here, all of which take place in the mid to late nineteenth-century, narrativize various forms of male-propagated violence along the Texas-Mexico border in distinct ways. Gonzalez and Raleigh’s *Caballero*, for example, underscores the racial dimensions of competing Mexican and Anglo hegemonic masculine codes, highlighting how both of these scripts in various ways subjugate women and punish men who deviate from the prescribed norms in the increasingly modernizing Lower Rio Grande Valley. McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* explores masculinity construction through the guise of three hegemonic Anglo male leaders, each of whom undertakes physical and/or epistemic violence against Mexicans and other non-Whites. Meanwhile, Boullosa’s *Texas: La gran ladronería en el lejano norte* posits anti-Anglo rebellion as a licit masculine recourse for Mexican and Mexican-American men fighting against capitalist Anglo male entrepreneurs. At the same time, Boullosa’s novel questions the racial parameters that qualify legitimate citizenship (and maleness) in the United States’ recently acquired Texas territory by
privileging the voices and actions of female characters whose actions and thoughts might otherwise lie outside the historical archive altogether.

In his study of American masculinities from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, sociologist Michael Kimmel stresses homosociality and the compulsion to define one’s manhood in relation to that of highly regarded models: “American men,” argues Kimmel, “define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other. Masculinity is largely a homosocial enactment” (*Manhood in America* 7). This observation proves especially true for what Kimmel terms the nineteenth-century “Self-Made Man”—an individual who, thanks in part to a then-emergent market economy, exhibited “a model of manhood that derives identity entirely from a man’s activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographic and social mobility” (16) and who sought “to remake America in his own image—restless, insecure, striving, competitive, and extraordinarily prosperous” (43). In response to “the anarchy of the marketplace,” the nineteenth century Self-Made Man, Kimmel contends, lacked fixity with regard to his “economic, political, and social identity,” thus contributing to a “sense of himself as a man [who] was in constant need of demonstration. Everything became a test—his relationships to work, to nature, and to other men” (43). The homosocial component of masculinity construction calls attention to the motivating factors that inform men’s behaviors, as well as the compulsion toward public demonstrations of actions and behaviors considered masculine-appropriate. The male characters in these narratives typify these prerogatives, reflecting Connell’s observation that, “[h]egemony, subordination and complicity ... are relations internal to the gender order” (*Masculinities* 80). At the same time, though, this historical reality
necessitates an acute focus on the processes by which these restless, often Westward-moving men of the nineteenth century defined themselves and their respective imagined communities through a process of othering those individuals who did not form part of white Anglo male social circles.

III.J. Manifesting (Male) Destinies: Imagined Communities of Anglo Men

Sociologist Joane Nagel observes that nineteenth-century masculinity construction in the United States strongly corresponded to the “nationalist imperialist” project of “manifest destiny, which justified and extended the US sphere of influence to include the entire western hemisphere” (“Masculinity and Nationalism” 249). Building off of this and other insights, this study affirms that the Anglo male characters in these border narratives construct masculine identities through strategic forms of violence against women and non-white borderland dwellers in ways that configure them as nation building-or-defending agents. How these male characters position themselves as such in an imagined collectivity demands further critical attention. This study maintains that territorial expansion and capital accumulation in these three texts reflect the processes by which the Anglo men studied here construct their masculine and national identities.

In his study regarding the growth of nationalism, Benedict Anderson defines the modern nation-state as “an imagined political community” (Imagined Communities 6) that compels and maintains loyalties of its citizens by virtue of a fraternal connection between its present members and an immemorial past. In Anderson’s view, this “deep horizontal comradeship” sustains these imagined communities, at the same time that it enables individuals to develop, and identify with, narratives of culture and belonging (7). Anderson is not alone. Postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha espouses a similar vision of
the nation-state in his essay entitled “Narrating the Nation”, arguing that “[n]ations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye” (1). Thus, in Bhabha’s view, “it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force” (1). By underscoring how the male characters in these narratives conceive of the nation as an imagined (male) community in which they operate as nation-building or defending actors, readers are better equipped to interrogate how the “symbolic force” of the nation in these borderland narratives emerges alongside hegemonic Anglo masculinities. The ubiquity of male-enacted violence factors prominently in each of these narratives: through varying forms of violence are the Anglo male characters able to serve, construct, and defend the nation; and through these same forms of violence do they establish and maintain the borders between citizen and other, us and them, masculine and feminine.

An integral part of this process, the hegemonic male archetypes with which these three novels wrestle finds a strong foundation in nineteenth-century United States discourse regarding Western expansion. Connell, for example, correctly argues that “even before [the American] frontier closed, with military defeat of the native peoples and the spread of white settlement across the continent, frontiersmen were being promoted as exemplars of masculinity” (Masculinities 194). Nagel goes even further, arguing that “[m]asculinity and nationalism articulate well with one another, [for] the modern form of Western masculinity emerged at about the same time and place as modern nationalism ... in the West about a century ago” (“Masculinity and Nationalism” 249). Each of these
three writers grapples with the historical contingencies of masculinity construction in unique ways by interrogating and deconstructing the cultural, political, and economic hegemony of these hegemonic Anglo male characters.

IV. Argument and Chapter Outline

Treating each of these novels as an individual case study, this project will examine how hegemonic masculine archetypes along the mid 1800s Texas-Mexico border reify racial and gender hierarchies against the backdrop of territorial expansion and capital accumulation. These figures condone violent masculine performances that stem from, coalesce with, and reinforce a cultural logic consonant with the United States’ nineteenth-century westward expansion. By exploring the historical contingencies that inform Mexican and Anglo masculinities as portrayed by this group of novelists, this project illuminates the strategies through which these authors, from their own subject positions, portray hegemonic male archetypes who strive for cultural, economic, and political hegemony in the Texas-Mexico borderlands.

IV.A. Caballero (1920s-1930s, pub. 1996) by Jovita González and Eve Raleigh

Chapter two explores how in their novel Caballero (1930s-40s, pub. 1996), Jovita González and Eve Raleigh attempt to neutralize Anglo-Mexican conflict along the border by casting two Anglo male archetypes in ambivalent terms as both emancipatory agents and imperialist actors. Employing Homi K. Bhabha’s vision of cultural hybridity and colonial ambivalence, as well as Dana D. Nelson’s model of white capitalist citizenship, I argue that the confrontation of competing Mexican and Anglo male codes forces the enunciation of new subject positions for the female characters which negatively—and at times violently—impact the power dynamics of the eroding Mexican patriarchy. The
writers’ representation of the Anglo male characters confirms their complicity with Westward expansion and physical violence against Mexican (men), but it also problematizes binary thinking with respect to these two groups. The white male characters function on the one hand as imperial actors while also serving as vehicles for the central female characters’ liberation from Mexican patriarchy. Even so, the female characters can make their claims to greater autonomy only by emphasizing their whiteness, accommodating themselves to a capitalist economy, and fulfilling the imperatives attendant to heterosexual marriage.

González and Raleigh write in the wake of racialized border violence at the beginning of the twentieth century, but they are also two women from radically different backgrounds writing nearly a decade after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and two decades before the rise of the Chicano Movement. In spite, or perhaps because, of the disparities between their individual subject positions, the authors proffer their co-authored romance as a type of “foundational fiction” that foregrounds Anglo-Mexican heterosexual love as a mechanism that ideally abridges racial and cultural antagonisms in González’s native Lower Rio Grande Valley. By lauding these unions accordingly, the authors promote an ambivalent representation of the Anglo male characters as both emancipators and imperialists. These same Anglo men affirm the superiority of their territorial and juridical claims, and they demonstrate cultural flexibility only to the extent these strategies advance each man’s political clout or economic security. In the end, the latter are secured through marriages to the Mexican patriarch’s daughters, who ascribe to a white capitalist model of citizenship, exercise greater autonomy in their new domestic roles as wives, and work to uproot Mexican patriarchy. This project argues that while the
text links legitimate citizenship to “white capitalist citizenship,” it does so reticently, reflecting a series of tensions best visible in the ambivalent roles of the two Anglo male characters. The authors critique Mexican patriarchy and Anglo territorial expansion, but they ultimately suggest that capitalist entrepreneurialism affords opportunities for an interstitial feminine agency that, though not ideal, nonetheless makes a pragmatic headway toward gender egalitarianism and Anglo-Mexican fraternity.

IV.B. Blood Meridian (1985) by Cormac McCarthy

Chapter three explores how Cormac McCarthy’s Blood Meridian calibrates the advantages of physical and epistemic violence for its westward moving Anglo male characters. Taking place along the borderlands shortly before and after the Mexican-American War (1846-48), the text narrativizes the masculine trajectory of its young male protagonist who, under the guidance of three Anglo male models, grapples with the imperatives to commit physical acts of violence against borderland residents of color. Through a thematic father-son trajectory that characterizes the kid’s relationship to his mentors, McCarthy explores the evolution of violence in the region through each of these archetypal figures and their relationship to the child protagonist. Using the model of mimetic desire and scapegoating developed by philosopher and anthropologist René Girard, as well as the theoretical models of performativity and abjection by Judith Butler Julia Kristeva, this chapter charts the evolution of violence in the borderlands in relation to the kid’s affirmation and resistance to the text’s violent male script.  

First, this chapter explores how Anglo nationalism consolidates homosocial communities by abjecting Mexicans and configuring them as worthy and necessary targets of physical violence for the defense of republican government. Second, this
chapters charts how the commodification of brown bodies normalizes physical violence against colored individuals with the promise of monetary profit for the text’s white men. Lastly, it explores how the epistemic violence of Anglo conquest, through the destruction of cultural artifacts and sacred places of both Mexicans and Native Americans, secures the hegemony of the novel’s last Anglo male archetype, thereby forestalling any attempts to alter the region’s existing power structures. The kid’s ultimate about-face and adoption of an allegedly feminine charity counters the violence of the region’s deeply rooted male script and ultimately configures him as a deviant to the novel’s homosocial, quasi-religious order. His foil in the end affirms the inveterate nature of this Anglo male code, while the epilogue suggests the perpetuation of this male regime through the advent of a nascent capitalism.

IV.C. Texas: La gran ladronería en el lejano norte (2012) by Carmen Boullosa

Chapter four explores how Carmen Boullosa’s Texas gauges the construction and performance of Anglo and Mexican masculinities against the backdrop of Anglo-pioneered capitalism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Like Blood Meridian and Caballero, this text draws heavily from historical antecedents by narrativizing the “Cheno-Cortina Raids” that took place between 1859 and 1860 in Brownsville, Texas. The Mexican rebel Juan Cortina—an historical character who also appears in González and Raleigh’s Caballero—undertakes a series of racially motivated uprisings against immigrant Anglos. Working within theoretical models developed by colonial scholars Walter Mignolo and Freya Schiwy, as well as sociologist Anibal Quijano, I contend that Boullosa’s novel deconstructs the coloniality of masculine (capitalist) entrepreneurialism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Physical violence, this chapter proposes, operates as a
calculated and compensatory masculine resource appropriated by Mexicans and directed against the Texas Anglos, in order to reassert the validity of the former’s territorial claims and rights of citizenship. Nevertheless, the economic violence against non-whites sustains the hegemonic authority of the central Anglo male character, Charles Stealman. Through a moral calculus of capitalist opportunism and Anglo supremacy, this figure encodes an “epistemic privilege”, to use David Saldívar’s term (“Unsettling Race, Coloniality, and Class” 196), that entrenches the economic and political power of wealthy Anglo men, while also fettering questions of legitimate citizenship to a pro-Anglo racial hierarchy.

By representing Anglo-Mexican conflict in these terms, Boullosa explores the efficacy of economic violence in the construction and preservation of political and gender power shortly after the birth of the modern-day border. Additionally, the author embattles two contentious views of citizenship that emerge along race and gender lines: the Anglo Stealman emphasizes territorial and capital accumulation as markers of manliness and citizenship, disdaining the racial miscegenation of his Mexican counterparts as evidence of their alleged cultural retrograde and biological regression; the Mexican Nepomuceno, meanwhile, advocates a more racially heterogeneous view of citizenship that both acknowledges Anglos as part of the new borderlands milieu while also precluding the racial ideologies, economic advantages, and illicit juridical apparatus of the region’s Anglo men. Unlike the other two novels studied here, Boullosa privileges throughout her novel the thoughts and actions of her female characters by representing them as conduits for a type of “border thinking” that deconstructs the region’s heteronormative order of male visibility and female domesticity.

V. Concluding remarks
In her introductory essay to the anthology *Voces sin fronteras: Antología Vintage Espanol de literatura mexicana y chicana contemporánea*, author and journalist Cristina García expounds upon the interlocking, conflicting, and ever-evolving dimensions of the U.S.-Mexico border in political, cultural, and literary terms:

La frontera que separa a México de los Estados Unidos es mucho más que una división geográfica. Es un cable con una carga que atrae y repele, una invitación, una amenaza, una imposición política, un animado diálogo en curso, una serie de perforaciones. En la frontera, los idiomas y las culturas chocan, se entremezclan, explolan, se redefinen a sí mismos. Brotan continuamente léxicos nuevos, se negocian identidades, se construyen realidades alternas. Tampoco falta la miseria o la explotación o los cables trampa de la incomprensión. No obstante, la frontera sigue siendo, como siempre, un lugar fértil para soñar. No existe solamente una frontera sino muchas a ambos lados del Río Grande. Ser mexicano, méxicoamericano o chicano es formar parte de comunidades ampliamente diversas y complejas, con lealtades múltiples e identidades unidas con varios guiones. (“Introduction” xv)

This project explores the literary representation of this “lugar fértil para soñar” in three borderland novels by Mexican, U.S., and Mexican-American writers, using the backdrop

27 “The border that separates Mexico from the United States is much more than a geographical division. It is a cable with a charge that attracts and repels, an invitation, a warning, a political imposition, a dialogue in process, a series of perforations. On the border, languages and cultures collide, intermingle, explode, and redefine themselves. New lexicons continually blossom, identities are negotiated, alternate realities are constructed. Misery or exploitation or the trap cables of incomprehension aren’t lacking either. Nevertheless, the border continues to be, as always, a fertile place for dreaming. There doesn’t exist simply one border but rather many on both sides of the Rio Grande. To be Mexican, Mexican-American, or Chicano is to form part of thoroughly diverse and complex communities, with multiple loyalties and united identities with various scripts” (my translation).
of masculinity studies as a mechanism to better understand the narrative representation of these conflicts and asymmetries of power.

The racial ideologies and nationalistic sentiments that promoted U.S. Westward expansion have long attracted the attention of scholars across disciplines. The convergence of both within the construction of Anglo masculine codes in borderland narratives, however, has thus far drawn little commentary regarding the role of gendered power in the shaping of westward expansion. Specifically, literary scholars have not sufficiently analyzed the forms of violence in borderland narratives, how they are performed and managed, and how each compliments Anglo hegemonic masculinities that configures individuals of color as deleterious ‘others’ whose violent elimination fortifies claims to whiteness and maleness. This project explores how, through the symbolic abjection or physical denigration of colored borderland individuals, the Anglo male characters in these borderlands texts are able to construct, maintain, and reinforce claims to gender superiority, all while aligning themselves within the imagined, homosocial matrix of “nation.”

The fact that the United States was expanding its geographical domain throughout the nineteenth century (and well into the twentieth century) forces a reconsideration of how, in these three novels, the nation is imagined, where and by whom its borders are demarcated, and through what exclusionary logic do the male characters maintain cultural, gendered, and territorial strongholds. I argue that through the imagined bonds of whiteness and maleness, and by recourse to land-capital accumulation, the Anglo male characters in these novels construct masculine codes that compliment their defense of and loyalty to the nation-state, often through strategic uses of violence against women and
people of color. In addition, this project explores how the U.S.-Mexico border operates in these novels as a contact zone of contesting cultural and gender norms, examining the ways in which this disputed territory reifies Anglo national loyalties and homosocial bonds through the violent elimination or discursive stigmatization of non-white, supposedly effete or culturally retrograde borderland dwellers. An analysis of how these Anglo male characters envision themselves as part of a homosocial community of (white) male actors compels readers to examine the larger configurations of power, gender, and violence in a region that typifies a long-standing “legacy of conquest.”

In addition to thematizing the masculinist dimensions of power undergirding the Westward-moving U.S. empire, the novels of González and Raleigh, McCarthy, and Boullosa recreate the nationalistic discourses and gendered social practices that maintained the racialized status quo of Anglos’ claims to cultural preeminency and territorial expansion in the mid to late nineteenth century. All of this is not to say, however, that the texts studied here affirm simple racial binaries and stratified gender codes. Rather than affirm the borderlands as a monolith of shared patriotic duties and simple gender dichotomies, these texts instead explore the divergent interests, loyalties, and social hierarchies that emerge from the exchanges among Anglos and non-whites. By qualifying characters’ contested claims to cultural legitimacy and territorial sovereignty

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28 William Earl Weeks speaks extensively of imperialism and continental expansion in his study of U.S. foreign relations entitled *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations. Volume 1: Dimensions of the Early American Empire, 1754-1865*. In his introduction, Weeks elaborates ten qualifiers of imperialism as they relate to a then nascent United States, reminding readers that the U.S. “was built on the conquest of people--Native American, Hispanic, French, and others” and that in addition to territorial domination, the American Empire “also connotes the full cultural, economic, ideological, and maritime reach of a civilization that self-consciously saw itself as the cutting edge of human history” (xix). Scholars remain divided, though, as to when and under whose administration U.S. imperialism most significantly emerges. In *The Foundations of the American Empire: William Henry Seward and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Ernest N. Paolino posits the Spanish-American War of 1898 as the likely starting point (ix), while William Earl Weeks argues in *John Quincy Adams & American Global Empire* that the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 best marks the inception of U.S. imperialism.
in terms of nationalism and gender performance, the novels studied here delineate a calculus of power embedded within racial and gender discourses, as well as their attendant social hierarchies and political institutions. In addition, these novels recreate and explore the ways in which the primary social actors of Western expansion--Anglo men--invoke an imagined homosocial fraternity to buttress their cultural and territorial claims against those who are excluded from the co-constitutive domains of “whiteness” and “maleness.” My reading of these novels highlights how male-enacted violence complements and advances this racial hierarchy and its correlative appeal to Anglo cultural and political superiority. What’s more, this study demonstrates how the particular forms of violence against nonwhites that these domains necessitate both legitimize and encode an Anglo script of “maleness” in contradistinction to colored men (supposedly effete, lazy, or contaminated) and women (whose symbolic value as conduit, prize, or moral paragon varies depending upon her color and national loyalties). Let us now turn to our first case study.
Chapter Two: “We are a people who never sit still”: Ambivalence, Hybridity, and White Capitalist Citizenship in *Caballero* (1930s-1940s, pub. 1996) by Jovita González and Eve Raleigh.

“Yes, fusion *is* possible / but only if things get hot enough--”
-Cherríe Moraga

I. Introduction

The present chapter argues that in their novel *Caballero*, Jovita González and Eve Raleigh configure two Anglo male archetypes as ambivalent agents, who function alternately as both imperialists and emancipators by advancing an ethos of capitalist entrepreneurialism and heteronormative domesticity. Taking place shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in the United States’ recently acquired Lower Rio Grande Valley, *Caballero* thematizes competing masculinized nationalisms from both sides of the recently formed U.S.-Mexico border, each of which entails a series of gendered prerogatives that the characters either resist or affirm in conjunction with their loyalties to competing nation-states. The dual roles of the Anglo male characters allow them to operate as nation-building and defending actors in ways that endorse their respective masculinities to the detriment of the Mexican men. The Mexican female characters, in turn, mobilize an interstitial agency through their marriages to these same Anglo men, thereby disturbing the continuity of Mexican patrilineage and ensuring a more syncretic borderlands.

In spite of these cross-border unions, though, the text privileges whiteness as a marker of citizenship, in ways that configure the Anglo male characters as purveyors of cultural and economic capital. This chapter proposes that the authors represent these competing masculinized nationalisms and their attendant gender codes accordingly as a way to neutralize the contentious racial conflicts that permeated the borderlands during

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29 Quote obtained from Cherríe Moraga’s poem “The Welder” (219-20).
their own historical period. This study also maintains that the authors are only able to do so problematically--that is, by trivializing an economic model that disadvantages Mexican men, upends the Mexican hacienda, and promotes the Anglo males’ limited racial scope concerning legitimate citizenship. The effort to establish an idealized hybrid border community accordingly (one that would ultimately afford greater, albeit limited, autonomy to Mexican women) emerges from within these contradictions, all of which might have qualified *Caballero* as an interventionary text had it been published at the time of its completion.

A historical romance novel beginning in the mid nineteenth century and concluding in the early 1900s, *Caballero* narrativizes the dissolution of the Mendoza patriarchy following the arrival of Anglo male entrepreneurs shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Unfolding against the backdrop of territorial contestation, sexual politics, and questions of racial and cultural purity, *Caballero* thematizes the resolution of Mexican-Anglo conflict through marriages between its two Anglo male protagonists and the daughters of the increasingly marginalized Mexican patriarch. Due in part to these unions and the cultural concessions that ensue, both the Mexican hacienda and its attendant patriarchal code fragment, superseded by a nascent Anglo-led capitalism. The Mexican men suffer increasing disenfranchisement, while the other characters (Anglo and Mexican alike) make greater claims to autonomy in the more amalgamated borderlands. Why the authors represent the region and its inhabitants accordingly responds in large part to a number of complex social phenomena during the time of the novel’s production.
During the first half of the twentieth century, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands witnessed a number of changes at the local, national, and binational levels that affected the region, its people, and its resources in dramatic and complex ways. The United States Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917, a legislative maneuver that negatively impacted documented immigrants and the Southwest labor force while effecting virtually no change in Mexican immigration to the United States (Foley *White Scourge* 45). In 1924, Congress officially institutionalized the United States Border Patrol, thereby supplementing its existing force of sixty mounted men who had previously been charged with patrolling the nearly 2,000 mile border with Mexico (47). In the 1940s, Mexican immigration became institutionalized for the first time in United States history (Gómez *Manifest Destinies* 139), and during the same decade, the Bracero Program led Mexican migrants (documented or otherwise) to rural agricultural areas in the U.S. in spite of the program’s many abuses (Lorey *The U.S.-Mexican Border* 120-22). In 1943, United States sailors in Los Angeles attacked Mexican-American youth, leading to what would later be called the Zoot Suit Riots—a series of racially motivated disturbances that did not end until the intervention of the Mexican ambassador and U.S. Secretary of State (Rodriguez *Days of Obligation* 58).

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30 It is important here to also highlight the effects of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) on U.S.-bound Mexican migration. Historian Timothy J. Henderson writes, “In 1910, Mexico was suddenly plunged into a bloody, chaotic, and prolonged revolution, which turned an already harsh situation into an unmitigated catastrophe. Agriculture virtually ground to a halt as revolutionary armies, brigands, and marauders ravaged the countryside. Corn prices soared again, and real wages dropped by three quarters. Perhaps a million people flooded into the United States during the decade from 1910 to 1920” (“Mexican Immigration to the United States” 605).

31 David E. Lorey lists “the failure by employers to pay wages, the forced deportation of laborers after work had been performed, pesticide and herbicide poisoning, lengthy work days, and unhealthful and unsafe conditions” as some of these abuses (*The U.S.-Mexican Border* 122). In Texas, the abuses were particularly felt. In fact, Henderson reminds us that Mexico blacklisted Texas as ineligible to receive bracero workers due to the region’s longstanding record of racial discrimination. The ban remained in effect from 1943 to 1947, after which point “the terms of the program were renegotiated, [and] Mexico lost its right to blacklist” (“Mexican Immigration in the United States” 609).
At the beginning of the intervening and equally tumultuous decade, Mexican-American folklorist Jovita González published an article entitled “America Invades the Border Towns” (1930). Written at a time when many thought of Mexicans in homogenous, if not entirely negative, terms (Garza-Falcón Gente decente 80), the article offers a counter-narrative of the Texas borderlands in comparison with the positions articulated in much of the Anglo male-dominated historiography and folklore of her day. Likely written as a response to both the nativist biases of her field and the historical events of her own time, the article in question, as its title unapologetically suggests, addresses the complexities of the borderlands in ways that posit newly arrived Anglos in ambivalent, at times damming, terms.

In this important and often overlooked article, and in contrast to much of her other professional publications, González confronts the exploitation of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the Texas borderlands in economic and racial terms. Consider, for example, González’s remarks concerning the latter:

In the towns the Mexicans see themselves segregated in their own quarters and looked down upon as an inferior race. It is a racial struggle, a fight between an aggressive, conquering and materialistic people on the one hand, and a volatile but passive and easily satisfied race on the other. It is the struggle between the New World and the Old, for the Texas-Mexicans have retained, more than their brethren in Mexico, the old-world traditions, customs and ideals. The old families resent the gulf which the newly arrived Americans have set between them. Not that they are eager for the friendship of the American families, but they object to the fact that they are considered an inferior race. (“America Invades the Border
The work of Jovita González, particularly *Caballero* (co-authored with Eve Raleigh), has steadily attracted the attention of scholars since the 1990s. The aforementioned article proves important for this particular case study because in it, González examines the colonial legacy of the borderlands in racial terms. In *Caballero*, written shortly afterwards during the 1930s and 1940s but not published until 1996, the author confronts this same colonial legacy along similar lines. Here, however, González nuances her representation against the backdrop of masculinized nationalisms from both sides of the recently formed border. While the text showcases the racial and cultural antagonisms underpinning Anglo-Mexican contact in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, it does so through either the deconstruction or affirmation of specific gendered prerogatives.

II. Theoretical Framework and Argument

In addition to the theoretical principals of masculinity scholarship outlined in chapter one, this case study relies upon theoretical frameworks developed by literary scholars Homi K. Bhabha and Dana D. Nelson in order to demonstrate how the female characters negotiate new subject positions within the liminal borderlands through their marriages to Anglo male entrepreneurs and the subsequent efforts to upend Mexican patriarchy. While the Anglo men here are cast in paradoxical terms as both agents

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32 As an accomplished folklorist in her native Texas, González would have been more than capable of writing the text on her own, especially considering the fact that she wrote her M.A. thesis in history on the history of the region. José E. Limón has argued that the decision to seek a co-writer was the result of interference by González’s husband (“Introduction” xvii). Limón also criticizes the patriarchal overtones of Texas folklore in the early 20th century, affirming that González’s folklore output “offers an overwhelmingly male-centered and ethnically complicated interpretive sense of the Mexican world of South Texas” (xvii).

33 Leticia M. Garza-Falcón argues that Teresa Palomo Acosta and Cynthia Orozco resurrected González’s work at the 1990 “Mexican Americans in Texas History” conference in San Antonio (*Gente decente* 74). In 1992, Isabel Cruz donated the “Mireles Papers” to what was then Corpus Christi State University Library Archives (now Texas A&M -Corpus Christi) (79). Scholar José E. Limón published her novel *Caballero* in 1996 after the discovery of its manuscript.

34 José E. Limón also recovered a second work of fiction by González, entitled *Dew on the Thorn*. 
complicit with imperialism and as catalysts of greater female autonomy, the construction and performance of their respective masculinities draws recourse to whiteness and capital accumulation in order to advance their status as nation builders and defenders in the United States’ recently acquired borderlands. In this section, I will briefly outline the key principles undertaken in these theoretical models in order to demonstrate how these concepts aid our reading of this particular case study.

Written only a few decades after a series of deadly border raids and in the midst of increasing racial and economic anxiety, Caballero narrativizes the arrival of Anglos in the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The tensions that permeate the novel stem from the use of physical violence by both Anglo and Mexican men, as well as how each group asserts competing notions of national allegiance and cultural legitimacy. Of equal importance is the question of racial purity—principles that the marriages between Anglo men and Mexican women complicate for the longstanding, but increasingly decadent, Mexican patriarchy. Throughout Caballero, heterosexual marriage strongly informs social hierarchies and partially neutralize racial antagonisms through exogamy. While the Mexican female characters are able to assert greater autonomy through their marriages to Anglo men, the gendered duties of heterosexual marriage and U.S. citizenship ultimately limit their claims to agency.

35 Marci R. McMahon notes, “As Gonzalez wrote Caballero during the Depression, prejudice against Mexican Americans flourished as several interest groups blamed Mexican immigrants for the nation’s financial problems” (“Politicizing Spanish-American Domesticity” 237). There is some debate, though, as to when González began writing the novel with or without the help of Raleigh. Unlike Limón (“Mexicans, Foundational Fictions” 349) and McMahon (“Politicizing Spanish-American Domesticity” 237), Leticia M. Garza-Falcón argues that González likely began writing the novel as early as 1915 or 1916 (Gente Decente 79). Regardless, it is helpful to keep in mind, as geographer Joseph Nevins has recalled, that it was during the first three decades of the twentieth century “that U.S. authorities first began to use the label ‘alien’ to describe Mexicans in the Southwest” (Operation Gatekeeper 54).
While the racial anxieties of the authors’ own historical period cast Mexicans as threats to the purity of white civilization, the opposite transpires in *Caballero*. Here, as the Anglo males supersede the cultural and economic hegemony of their Mexican male counterparts, they treat the Mexican females as conduits for the perpetuation of an imagined “white” national community. To understand how these Anglo male characters envision their collective identities as “American” and as “men”, I turn to Dana D. Nelson’s concept of white capitalist citizenship.

Arguing that “[n]ational [U.S.] manhood reached for stability through multiple, multiplying calculations of otherness” (*National Manhood* 63), Nelson observes that the sedimentation of racial categories in the post-Revolutionary United States corroborated the belief that White manhood would ensure national purity and livelihood:

Whiteness contained the centrifugal forces of an imagined democracy through the very process of ideologically extending whiteness to groups of men who otherwise might not have found that category a meaningful or primary social marker for identity. Thus the apparently democratizing grant of national (white) manhood worked to manage local democracy by virtualizing it, ensuring the establishment of a functionally centralized (and arguably counterdemocratic) political structure through the seeming decentralizing allocation of sovereignty to ‘the people.’ (60)

Consonant with Kimmel’s observation regarding market competition (*Manhood in America* 16–7, 43), Nelson proposes that “through the ‘common’ and more abstracted bodily bond of whiteness, men learned to train their own class, regional, and political rivalries toward the ‘managed’ competition of the market economy” (*National Manhood*
60) and that “[i]ndependent, self-interested manhood [became] the governing principle for capitalist citizenship” (46). The intersection of masculinity construction and capitalism in *Caballero* has not entirely eluded the attention of scholars. Marci R. McMahon, for one, argues that “Gonzalez’s configuration of Anglo-American cultural values in the north as egalitarian problematically valorizes white masculinity” (“Politicizing Spanish-American Domesticity” 243). Pablo Ramírez, meanwhile, maintains that *Caballero* “demonstrates how intercultural unions between Mexicans and Anglos can become an effective means of preserving the fine qualities of whiteness” (“Resignifying Preservation” 26).

The present study builds from these observations by examining the compulsions and tensions that underpin the “white capitalist citizenship” model that *Caballero* explores through its configuration of competing Anglo and Mexican masculinities. The intersection of whiteness (Anglo versus Spanish-Mexican) and economics (capitalist expansion versus hacienda stasis) forces the characters to grapple with competing notions of cultural legitimacy and national allegiance. Thus, while the Anglo male characters establish and retain positions of power in the borderlands, the Mexican characters respond to this new socio-economic order in distinct ways that reflect a gendered logic: the Mexican men largely react with physical violence and refuse to negotiate their racial, class, and national allegiances, while the Mexican women modify cultural scripts and assert greater claims to autonomy through their marriages to entrepreneurial Anglo men. The former suffer increasing marginalization, while the latter must negotiate new claims to agency within the limitations of heterosexual marriage and white capitalist citizenship.
As such, the Anglo males’ advancement of, and the Mexican female’s acclimation to, this cultural logic forces a narrative tension that disavows simple binaries in the text’s representation of these two groups. I incorporate Homi K. Bhabha’s model of colonial ambivalence and cultural hybridity in order to better examine this dynamic against the backdrop of masculinity performance. Bhabha correctly observes that “[t]erms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively” (The Location of Culture 2) and that one must interrogate the “disciplinary discourses and institutions of knowledge that constitute the condition and contexts of culture” (163). Just as the Anglo men enjoy, and the Mexican women strive toward, white capitalist citizenship, they each hold ambiguous and conflicting positions: the Anglo men as imperialists and liberators, the Mexican females as conduits and more independent actors.

Since its discovery in 1993 and subsequent publication in 1996, Caballero has steadily attracted the attention of scholars both for its unique place as a cultural artifact as well as for its representation of Mexican-Anglo conflict in the mid to late 1800s.\footnote{See José E. Limón’s introductory essay to the novel for more information about the recovery and publication of Caballero (‘Introduction’ xxii-xxvi).} Scholar María Cotera, for one, stresses the historical significance of González’s work in gendered terms, proposing that her fiction “stands as a critique on the limitations on female creativity in both Mexican American and Anglo culture” (“Engendering” 239).\footnote{In this particular article, Cotera examines a short story authored by González with regards to U.S.-Mexican cultural hybridity. Cotera does, however, qualify the aforementioned claim with regards to González’s other works of fiction: Caballero and Dew on the Thorn, both of which were published posthumously.} A number of other scholars have devoted special attention to the assimilationist subtext of the novel. Literary scholar Monika Kaup proposes that the novel “should be seen as a transculturated work, located at the intersection of conflicting discourses” and that
González incorporates a “forward-looking assimilationist South Texas rhetoric” (“The Unsustainable Hacienda” 562-3). Pablo Ramirez, on the other hand, takes a more positive approach regarding the novel’s representation of race, arguing that the text showcases the co-authors’ “progressive political agenda of integration without assimilation,” and that through the novel’s representation of interracial marriage, “whiteness is transformed from being the exclusive property of Anglos to being a communal property shared with Mexicans” (“Resignifying Preservation” 24).

While these and other critics have examined how the romance genre and characters’ interracial marriages work to resolve Mexican-Anglo antagonisms, scholars have not taken into consideration how the masculine codes of the novel’s male characters advance or impede this process. This chapter contends that the Anglo men advance a reckoning of national consciousness that fetters questions of citizenship to (Anglo) whiteness and an emergent market capitalism. This process implicates the Anglo men within the process of conquest as nation-builders, while simultaneously positing them as literal and figurative border-crossers who offer the privileges of white capitalist citizenship to their female Mexican lovers. The elite Mexican men, meanwhile, grapple with the loss of hacienda-based privilege, which Monika Kaup correctly identifies as “a humiliation couched in racial terms, or lack of whiteness” (“The Unsustainable Hacienda” 566). How, then, does the text represent its male and female characters against the backdrop of masculinity construction and performance?

This chapter proposes that Caballero configures two Anglo male archetypes as catalysts for the deconstruction of nineteenth-century Mexican patriarchy and the hacienda setting in which both take root. At the same time, the text casts these same
Anglo male characters in paradoxical terms both as agents of imperialism and as vehicles of greater female autonomy. By doing so, the text creates a narrative tension between the competing, and often violent, masculine performances of the Mexican men and those of their newly arrived Anglo counterparts. Each group asserts opposing claims to territorial governance, citizenship, and national allegiance in ways that demand masculine performance as a mechanism to either preserve or contest cultural strongholds. I argue that by qualifying the Anglo male characters as both emancipatory and imperialistic actors, the novel conduces an ambiguity that allows its Mexican female characters to articulate a hitherto foreclosed agency in ways that offset, and ultimately dismantle, the primacy of Mexican patrilineage. In spite of these concessions, the text ultimately truncates the Mexican women’s emergent claims to autonomy within the confines of heteronormative marriage and a nascent Anglo-pioneered capitalism. In the end, the performance of Anglo masculinity against the backdrop of territorial expansion and capital accumulation position these men as new hegemonic leaders in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

III. Historical Backdrop

III.A. Jovita González: Crossing the Borders of Gender and Race

Born in 1903, Jovita González was no stranger to the racial and political turmoil that characterized the borderlands throughout the early half of the twentieth century. In her study *Gente Decente: A Borderlands Response to the Rhetoric of Dominance*, scholar

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38 Along these lines, scholar Vincent Pérez notes, “Caballero recovers the Southwest’s own pre-modern agrarian socioeconomic institution--the semi-feudal hacienda--to negotiate a cultural and political path in the modern era for a population that, like the Old South’s, had been conquered in the mid-nineteenth-century by the United States” (*Remembering the Hacienda* 93).

39 Scholar Kathy Jurado affirms as much, stating “A drastically shifting economy, a result of the newly constructed railroad and de facto segregation for ethnic Mexicans, shaped the social world she lived in” (“Have we not a mind like they?” 210).
Leticia M. Garza-Falcón surveys González’s formative and professional years in her native Texas. González obtained her teaching certificate in 1918, earned her B.A. in Spanish at Our Lady of the Lake, taught full-time at Saint Mary’s Hall in San Antonio and later earned her M.A. in history at the University of Texas Austin, where she completed a thesis under Eugene C. Barker—an eminent Anglo historian who was reluctant to approve a thesis that he termed “an interesting but somewhat odd piece of work” (qtd. in Garza-Falcón, Gente Decente 75). While González’s thesis responded in part to the biases of her Anglo male peers, scholars have insisted that her career demonstrates more contradictions than it does a concerted defiance against an Anglo male-derived status quo. Garza-Falcón, for one, insists that while González and her husband remained distant from the Chicano movement of the mid twentieth century, they nonetheless forged a political consciousness in educational circles (Gente Decente 77).

Still, the author’s professional attitudes toward race prove difficult to ascertain. In fact, throughout her career, González consistently drew recourse to her own Spanish ancestry in order to highlight that she was “something other than a ‘common’ Mexican” (80).

Open to debate is whether or not these assertions reflect a “class/race paternalism,” as José E. Limón maintains (Dancing with the Devil 69), or the author’s attempts to make such claims in the name of professional expediency, as I myself am inclined to believe.

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40 Garza-Falcón asserts that Barker, in spite of his reservations, eventually conceded, accepting the opinion of Carlos E. Castañeda’s that “this thesis will be used in years to come as source material” (Gente Decente 75). Castañeda’s suspicion ultimately proved true, as historian David Montejano did in fact use González’s thesis for just that in his seminal study Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986.

41 María Cotera views González’s scholarly work as a sort of intervention: “In her thesis, González displaced the Texas Revolution, decentering its historical significance by treating it as merely one instance in a long history of transnational conflict that had transformed the borderlands ... Her refusal to follow the accepted story line of Texas history ... placed González at odds with the version of history popularized by Barker, Walter Prescott Webb, and even J. Frank Dobie” (Native Speakers 118). Cotera adds that González’s thesis functioned as “a counterhistory, a narrative that offered a distinctly Mexican perspective on the history of Texas and contested negative representations of Mexicano culture and people” (119).

42 Garza-Falcón specifies that González traced her ancestry to “aristocratic” landowners in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Gente Decente 80).
Regardless, this preoccupation with “whiteness”—a consistent thematic staple throughout *Caballero*—should come as no surprise when examined against the backdrop of racial thinking regarding Mexicans throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Arguing that both “[e]thnicity and race were constructs specific to time, place, and person,” historian Sarah Deutsch proposes that during the early twentieth-century, “Mexican-Americans were sometimes a race and sometimes a more permeable ethnic or cultural group, depending on the demands of the local economy” (“Landscape of Enclaves” 130). Historian Neil Foley makes similar observations that attest to why González likely highlighted her claims to “whiteness”: the decade preceding the writing of *Caballero* witnessed the highest rate of Mexican immigration to the United States at that time, with the concomitant effect of many viewing Mexican workers as “non-white aliens who rarely passed the cleanliness test for whiteness” (*The White Scourge* 42). In spite of growing ethno-racial consciousness among Mexican laborers, the litmus test for racial privilege extended far beyond occupational status, as Foley himself explains:

Whites ... rarely regarded Mexicans, including those who were born and raised in Texas and elsewhere in the United States, as American because American applied only to members of the white race, regardless of one’s citizenship or nationality. Mexicans, including Mexican Americans, had become, like the Chinese, a culturally and biologically inferior alien race. (44)

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41 John Mack Faragher writes, “Ethnic consciousness with a progressive orientation developed slowly among Mexican-Americans and did not take political form until after the mass emigration from Mexico, when the revolution of the 1910s pushed individuals out of their traditional communities and into the twentieth-century labor market” (“Americans, Mexicans, Métis” 107).
Likely as a response to this racial logic, González narrativizes border conflict in the mid to late nineteenth-century at a time when, according to literary scholar Pablo Ramirez, “Mexicans were seen as the ‘degraded’ products of racial mixture and thus as racially unintelligible” (“Resignifying Preservation” 25). An established folklorist of Mexican ancestry, González understood the complex and ever-changing discursive representation of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans on the northern side of the border. Equally conscious of the permeable political boundaries separating “white” and “non-white”, “citizen” and “foreigner”, González thematizes an idealized union of Mexicans and Anglos in a more syncretic borderlands, but she does so cautiously and with dogged reticence. González never entirely disavows the economic system (capitalism) and racial taxonomy (whiteness) that bolster the stereotypes that Caballero seeks to neutralize, but she also fails to posit whiteness or Anglo cultural scripts as somehow preeminently superior. What she is able to accomplish, however, is a type of interstitial agency that she affords to the novel’s Mexican women. In fact, González advances her idealized hybrid community precisely through this gendered scope, interrogating dominant gender scripts (neither of them ideal) on both sides of the border as she exposes the abuses of Mexican patriarchy and the domestic and economic imperatives of white capitalist citizenship.

While González achieved considerable renown for her work as a folklorist, her work (fictional and professional) does not always demonstrate consistency in its representation of the borderlands. In fact, her unique subject position within the Anglo male-dominated academy as a bilingual Mexican-American woman situates her as a type of figurative border-crosser regarding gender and race. Whether consciously or by

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44 Chicano scholar Ramón Saldívar affirms that all narratives “are preeminently and rigorously dialectical. Like the ideologies that they articulate, narratives both figure and are determined by their social context” (“Narrative Ideology” 13).
compulsion, González in many ways reflected the positions of her mentor, J. Frank Dobie, incorporating what José E. Limón identifies as Dobie’s “ethnographic style, his ideological vision, and something of his cultural contradictions because, to a considerable degree, they suited or were not that far removed from her own race and class derived inclinations” ("Folklore, Gendered Repression" 458). Limón insists that while González’s work evidences a “class/race paternalism” and “colonialist attitude” that bolsters the capitalist dominance of Texas Anglos (Dancing with the Devil 69), González did manage to resist, however partially, the biases of her mentor, as demonstrated in the author’s own remarks: “You see, it was an agreement that we made, that I would not go into one of his [Doby’s] classes because I would be mad at many things. He would take the Anglo-Saxon side naturally. I would take the Spanish and the Mexican side” (qtd. in Limón, “Folklore, Gendered Repression” 463). However much González’s Dobian sympathies worked to legitimize her scholarship, Limón does not prioritize the author’s contradictory positions as reflections of professional expediency. Garza-Falcón takes a somewhat different approach to the author’s apparent flippancy, insisting that throughout her life, González “was preoccupied with class identity” because she understood that for her Anglo counterparts, class distinction was one of the most palpable markers separating the gente decente (“decent people”, who enjoyed “the benefit of their landowning heritage”) from the corriente (“common people”) (Gente Decente 88).45 This study takes the ambivalence of Caballero as a point of departure, arguing that the conflicting roles of its two Anglo male protagonists function as a conduit for the author’s conciliatory

45 Indeed, González’s Anglo and Mexican counterparts viewed her very differently. Garza-Falcón writes, “By Anglo community standards, she was viewed as ‘upper crust’, while by the Mexican community she was either not known or perceived as aloof, mixing only with the highly educated Anglo and Spanish/Mexican society” (Gente Decente 97).
agenda. The representation of the borderlands in such ambivalent terms does not eliminate the problems that González sees as endemic to the region, but it does work neutralize them on the one hand, and on the other, to expose them for an early twentieth-century Anglo audience for whom the Nineteenth Amendment was little more than novel.

In time, González managed to become the first Mexican-American president, not to mention the first female president, of the Texas Folklore Society—an organization, according to María Cotera, “dominated by Anglo males of the ‘cowboy scholar’ variety” (*Native Speakers* 116). While some critics, such as Cotera (*Native Speakers* 104) and Kathy Jurado (“‘Have we not a mind like they?’” 213), claim that González contested the dominant racial discourses of her time, others disagree. As Garza-Falcón argues, the author’s recourse to Spanish “whiteness” reflected “good Mexican/bad Mexican dichotomies” while also allowing the author to ascend social (and racial) hierarchies and, thus, claim “objectivity” in her professional work (*Gente Decente* 80-7). This chapter proposes that *Caballero* casts race and gender as permeable and politically-charged social categories, thus allowing González, like the Chicana writers after her, to write against a national discourse in which Mexican-American women, to paraphrase scholar Anna Marie Sandoval, are included but not adequately recognized (*Toward a Latina Feminism of the Americas* 8). In spite of the ambivalence and contradictions underpinning González’s work, readers should remain conscious of how the author attempts to

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46 Garza-Falcón emphasizes that for González, class operated as a greater social marker than did race, adding that González identified “the later arriving ‘white trash’ from the North and Midwest [as those individuals who] caused the conflict and resentment” (*Gente Decente* 87). Neil Foley makes similar observations in the Texas region as a whole, arguing that “[p]oor whites, always low-ranking members of the whiteness club, were banished in the early twentieth century on the grounds that they were culturally and biologically inferior” (*The White Scourge* 6).
deconstruct these racial and gendered biases in *Caballero*. More nuanced attention regarding the border conflict of this particular era allows us to do just that.

**III.B. Border Conflict, Racial Antagonisms, and the Writing of *Caballero***

The discourses juxtaposing national or collective identity alongside territorial demarcations are no stranger to the history of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, in spite of how these phenomena have been understood at different times by different people. In addition to the historical developments outlined above, a number of other events along the border also informed the writing of *Caballero*. The “Plan of San Diego” raids of 1915 and 1916 in particular provoked havoc in González’s native Lower Rio Grande Valley. Spearheaded by Mexican revolutionaries and Mexican-American guerrillas, the disturbances left hundreds dead and were abated only by the response of U.S. soldiers, Texas Rangers, and local lawmen, all of whom combatted these guerrilla forces, at times crossing into Mexico to do so (Martínez *Troublesome Border* 87). In 1916, Villistas killed sixteen U.S. nationals in El Paso during what would later be called the Santa Ysabel Massacre. In spite of these conflicts, by the end of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the borderland area, according to historian Oscar Martínez, “shed its traditional role as a staging ground for imperialistic invasions, unlawful incursions, Indian depredations, bandit raids, and other confrontational activity” (87). The anxieties that were once affixed to territorial sovereignty (where the nation is) slowly gave way to claims of citizenry (who the nation is). As Neil Foley argues, Mexican immigration to Texas in the 1920s and 1930s—a time frame that nearly coincides with when González and Raleigh began writing their novel—“raised fears among Texas whites that Mexicans would destroy white civilization, while other whites who employed Mexicans on the
farms and in industry argued that Mexicans were simply too inferior to represent a threat to white America” (*The White Scourge* 41).

Marci R. McMahon contends that during the period in which González and Raleigh wrote *Caballero*, it was not uncommon for people to believe that individuals of Mexican descent were “outside citizenship”--a conviction compounded, she adds, by deportation and repatriation programs throughout the Southwest (“Politicizing Spanish-American Domesticity” 233). Given the contentious role of Texas in the United States’ expansion of slavery, it is also fruitful to keep in mind, as literary critic Vincent Pérez has argued in *Remembering the Hacienda*, that *Caballero* was written in the “racially charged context of the Jim Crow South” and that despite the González’s white sympathies--or what McMahon terms an “alliance with ‘whiteness’” (“Politicizing Spanish-American Domesticity” 240)--the novel might have operated “as an argument against Jim Crow segregation” had it been published shortly after its completion (106, author’s emphasis).

These observations prove particularly important: alert readers will recall that despite the novel’s epigraph (“a historical novel”), the text actually substitutes the relative tranquility of the post-Guadalupe years with the socio-racial tumult of the authors’ own historical period.\(^47\) It is against this backdrop of physical violence and racial antagonism (Jurado “‘Have we not a mind like they?’” 210-12), as well as the continued expansion of a capitalist market (Pérez *Remembering the Hacienda* 96; Faragher “Americans, Mexicans, Métis” 106; Cotera *Native Speakers* 106) that *Caballero* emerges. Before examining how

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\(^47\) María Cotera affirms, “In the years immediately following the U.S. Mexico War (1846-1848), relations between Anglos and Mexicans in the border region were marked by an ethos of relative tolerance for linguistic and cultural difference due to the small size of the Anglo population as well as the region’s isolation from the world beyond the Nueces River” (*Native Speakers* 107). It was not until the end of the Mexican Revolution, according to Cotera, that the “new Anglo ruling class deployed “popular xenophobic discourse about the inherent barbarism and filth of working-class Mexican ‘foreigners’ to describe all Mexican Americans” (107).
the authors represent these conflicts through the prism of masculinity construction, I will briefly explore how the romance genre operates as a mechanism that allows the authors to resolve these racial and cultural antagonisms.\footnote{Garza-Falcón contends that while González’s “earlier folkloristic writings published by the Texas Folklore Society do not reject the dominant culture’s general views of her people,” her fictional works \textit{Dew on the Thorn} and \textit{Caballero} “respond energetically to Webbian formulations of history” (\textit{Gente Decente} 76).}

\textbf{III.C. Romance Genre, the Role of History, and the Historical Backdrop of Manifest Destiny}

Whereas the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted a series of concessions to the Mexican nationals who were ‘crossed over’ by the newly formed border, several provisions of the treaty met stringent opposition. In Texas, for example, state leaders, according to historian David Montejano, “carried out [their] own deliberations concerning the status of the annexed Mexicans and their land grants” since under its 1845 statehood terms, Texas “retained jurisdiction over all the land within its borders” (\textit{Anglos and Mexicans} 38). Beyond questions of legislative authenticity, though, race also informed understandings of legitimate citizenship. In the same year of Mexico’s defeat, the Texas Constitutional Convention debated the voting rights of Mexicans within the state, specifically whether the word “white” should “be retained in the constitutional provisions that described the voters of the state” (38). Readers should also keep in mind the historical framework of González herself, with attention given to how a number of racialized conflicts that ultimately led the author to represent them in complex ways.

A race and gender minority in her own right, González worked within an academic setting dominated by Anglo men who espoused similar, often laudatory, views of Texas history and folklore. Whereas the 1920s and 30s witnessed the inferiorization of Mexicans through Jim Crow policies (Montejano \textit{Anglos and Mexicans} 9), the increasing
modernization of Texas throughout the 1930s and beyond held equally important implications for the region as a whole (Limón “Nations, Regions, and Mid-Nineteenth Century” 107). In Caballero, González chooses to avoid her own historical period in favor of the mid to late 1800s—a time in which the author, according to Monika Kaup, misreads “the historical record [in order] to establish a creative feminist position” (“The Unsustainable Hacienda” 569). That is, rather than narrativize the partial Mexicanization of recently arrived Anglos in the mid to late 1800s, the novel showcases the opposite. Why?

Limón, for one, has argued that the both González and Raleigh undertook their project accordingly in order to symbolically consolidate Mexican immigrants, “both the few left behind in the realignment of borders and the many who would join them as they left Altamirano’s failed postrevolutionary Mexico” (“Mexicans, Foundational Fictions” 349). With regards to the choice of genre, B.J. Manríquez argues that the authors likely opted for romance as its necessary oppositions correlate nicely with the many antagonisms separating Mexican and Anglo characters (“Argument in Narrative” 177). In its ability to facilitate the reconciliation of antithetical elements, the genre also operates, as Limón contends, as a “foundational fiction” in that the eroticization of heterosexual love between the members of opposing parties (Mexican and Anglo) works as a nation-building force to resolve racial conflicts, thereby ensuring the consolidation and perpetuation of the republic—the metaphorical offspring of these same heterosexual

49 This is not to say that the Lower Rio Grande Valley remained immune from the effects of modernization until the 1930s. As Monika Kaup notes, “South Texas was spared the destructive consequences of modernization and development until the arrival of the railway (in 1904), irrigation techniques, and subsequent mass Anglo immigration and farm developments” (“The Unsustainable Hacienda” 564)
unions (“Mexicans, Foundational Fictions” 347). In spite of these observations, scholars have not sufficiently examined how the text’s ambivalent representation of its Anglo male characters catalyzes this process while positioning them in conflicting roles as imperialists and emancipators. What’s more, scholars have not considered how these roles disadvantage the Mexican male characters whose failing claims to “whiteness” parallel the dissolution of their hacienda-based privileges.

IV. Mexican Patriarch as Hegemonic Authority

IV.A. Don Santiago: Patriarchal Privilege as Masculine Necessity

Taking place largely in the mid to late nineteenth-century, Caballero thematizes the dissolution of the Mendoza Mexican patriarchy and its semi-feudal hacienda, named Rancho La Palma de Cristo, after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo following the Mexican-American War. The forward of the text recounts the establishment of the Mendoza family in the modern day Lower Rio Grande Valley (then a part of New Spain). Occurring in 1748, the novel’s opening pages foreground a trajectory of Mexican patriarchy that reifies a perceived racial purity (Spanish whiteness) alongside a stratified social order that reflects strict gender roles. This dual process eventually forces both Mexican male and female characters to adhere to gender compulsions that in turn reflect notions of family honor.

Readers notice that juxtaposes the workings of Mexican patriarchy alongside whiteness and nobility. The narrator qualifies the Mendoza lineage as “[m]en of courage, of fortitude and of daring, men of wealth in whom was innate the culture of the mother

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Limón borrows the term “foundational fiction” from scholar Doris Sommer. For more information, see Sommer’s seminal study Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America.
country Spain. Men of vision” (*Caballero* xxxvii). The correlation of male fortitude with the alleged superiority of Spanish blood runs analogous to the later compulsions regarding noble marriage. Here, the dying patriarch José Ramón compels his male heir, the father of the future Don Santiago, to “[m]arry a women from the old families” since a “strong woman used to hardships can bear you many children that will live, to fill the house that I have built for them” (xxxix). This foundational mandate foreshadows a legacy of hacienda-based patriarchy that treats women as reproductive tools while also fettering questions of racial purity to the perpetuation of the Mendoza lineage.

Throughout the novel, readers witness Don Santiago, heir to the Mendoza hacienda, operating as a hegemonic figure who draws recourse to a gender and racial superiority in order to bolster his claims to patriarchal power against both Mexican women and the Anglo men. In chapter 3, Santiago chastises his sister, Dolores, by qualifying her independent personality as a catalyst for her husband’s death: “It is no secret that you helped him get to the other world with your independence and sharp tongue” (*Caballero* 25). His subsequent demand for acquiescence—“I command your respect if not your obedience. I am master here!” (26)—fortifies his claims through a rationale of male privilege that forecloses the possibility of sexual egalitarianism. Santiago’s wife suffers similar criticism in ways that configure her as both personally irritating and sexually pleasing. In fact, the narrator qualifies the patriarch’s self-aggrandizement at the expense of his wife by casting the latter’s meekness as a reflection of her own dubious racial pedigree: “Santiago was always silently blaming her, in these

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51 In his book *Colonial Desire; Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, colonial scholar Robert J.C. Young observes, “Culture never stands alone but always participates in a conflictual economy acting out the tension between sameness and difference” (53) and that, furthermore, culture “has always marked cultural difference by producing the other; it has always been comparative, and racism has always been an integral part of it” (54).
years to come, [in] that she was not the full-blooded mate of moods and passions to meet his own—the only kind of woman with whom he could have found true happiness” (27). As the novel progresses, the convergence of race and gendered power increasingly works to configure Don Santiago as the Lower Rio Grande Valley’s hegemonic presence.

The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo legally configures Santiago and his family as United States citizens without their consent—a measure that he resists in racial but also classist terms. At the beginning of the novel, Santiago affirms, “‘We may be Americanos now, but nothing can change the fact that we are always—hidalgos’” (Caballero 11). The effort to preserve his seat of power also finds footing in his decision to use physical violence against the Anglo men rather than move to Mexico or assimilate to an Anglo cultural order.52 The patriarch’s tactics often stem from the compulsion to preserve the longstanding Spanish-Mexican cultural order. Shortly after learning of the Anglos’ arrival, the narrator assures readers that while Santiago “had never seen an Americano closely or talked to one,” the word itself nonetheless “symboliz[ed] barbarism, destruction, evil” (14). Cloaked alternately in racial and classist terms, the enmity toward immigrant Anglo men increasingly operates as a force that promotes Mexican male camaraderie though the common bond of nativist pride.

In chapter 2, for example, Santiago’s own father, Don Francisco, admonishes him, “‘Allow no Americanos on this land. Have nothing to do with them, ever, build a wall between them and what is yours. Remember always that Ramón was killed because he defended his country against them. Fight them—fight them to the end!’” (Caballero 19). The antagonism grows more entrenched as the novel progresses. As Santiago works to

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52 In Chapter 1, Gabriel del Lago reveals to Santiago the news of the Anglos’ arrival, subsequently outlining three feasible options for the Mexican patriarch: 1.) move to Mexico and seek charity among his relatives, 2.) acclimate to Anglo society, or 3.) fight them all. Santiago chooses the latter (Caballero 14-5).
preserve the cultural order over which he presides as hegemonic authority, *Caballero*
qualifies the patriarch’s actions as patriotic endeavors that nonetheless distract him from
his hacienda duties. Readers learn in chapter thirteen that for Santiago, “[p]atriotism
burned high and hatred had a new life” (125), and, in chapter sixteen, the narrator writes
that “Don Santiago had no time for his family, leaving immediately after siesta to a
meeting place where the men were gathered to whip up their hatreds anew and now
denounce the *padre* [priest] as another sympathizer of the invaders” (150). The
representation of Don Santiago as a privileged, insular, and irascible patriarch should
come as no surprise when considered in conjunction with González’s article cited at the
beginning of this study. There, the author echoes similar sentiments regarding the
“haughty, landed [Mexican] aristocracy” as a whole, describing them as “impregnable in
their racial pride, liv[ing] in a world of their own, [and] sincerely believing in their rural
greatness” (“America Invades the Border Towns” 469). As *Caballero* progresses, and as
the Anglo men assert both their love interests and the superiority of their territorial
claims, Don Santiago’s invocation of racial purity, class elitism, and patriarchal privilege
testifies to the narrator’s critical observations in chapter 17 regarding Mexicans as a
whole:

The Mexican mind does not open readily—though neither does the French mind,
and many another. The high-class Mexican firmly believes that in him is
perfection of race and most of them, like the Mendozas, their wives’ families,
have married so the blood strain remained pure and in its class. It became a
fanaticism with many of them. (157-58)
While the text’s problematic homogenization of Mexicans here occludes critical differences separating distinct sectors of Mexican society, its interrogation of a perceived gender normativity exposes both race and class as equally potent forces that structure the hacienda social order. The distinctions separating Santiago from one of the few nonviolent non-Anglo men provides one such example.

Padre Pierre, the local Catholic priest, showcases his opposition to many of Santiago’s actions in ways that reflect gendered divergences: whereas Don Santiago extols male sexual promiscuity (Caballero 38), Padre Pierre leads a live of celibacy, which in turn invalidates his opinions among the other land-owning Mexican men (52); while the temperamental Santiago professes kinship with God the Father (6), the pragmatic Pierre uses his position to coerce the patriarch into accepting the Anglos as son-in-laws, terming them “the more virile race now [since] Texas will never again be ruled by Mexicans” (158); and whereas Santiago invokes physical violence against Anglos as a mechanism to ensure cultural hegemony and as a way to affirm one’s manhood (123), Padre Pierre advocates instead cultural syncretism, admonishing the patriarch to rescind his pride, welcome the Anglos into his home, and ultimately align himself with their cause (54-5). Along these lines, Vincent Pérez argues that the novel’s interrogation of patriarchy functions metonymically as a criticism of “the semi-fuedal old order” of the hacienda and that the intermarriages between the Anglo men and Santiago’s daughters reflect “the benefits of integration within the modern (capitalist) U.S. social order” (Remembering the Hacienda 96). While this study has stressed Don Santiago’s recourse to male privilege, racial purity, and class elitism as mechanisms that allow him to retain his hegemonic seat of power, it is just as important to understand how the novel
mobilizes space as an equally potent force in the maintenance and distribution of
gendered power. Alert readers will notice that the text’s representation of the hacienda
showcases how the encroachment of the Anglo men forces a reckoning of consciousness
for all characters regardless of the physical, gendered, or class borders separating them.

**IV.B. The Gendered Space of the Hacienda**

As readers will recall, the novel’s foreword qualifies patrilineage as a dominant
resource in the articulation of male power, but it also highlights the space of the hacienda
as an agent crucial for the perpetuation and preservation of the Mendoza male regime. As early as chapter 1, for example, the narrator foregrounds the hacienda over which
Santiago presides as a resource testifying to the ubiquity of his power: “Such was Don
Santiago, lord of land many miles beyond what his eye could compass, master of this
*hacienda* and all those that would soon gather before him” (*Caballero* 3). Read against
the backdrop of masculinity construction, the Mexican hacienda serves as the nucleus
from which the Mendoza patriarchy emerges. Stratified in terms of class positions and
sex roles, the hacienda confirms, encodes, and perpetuates normative notions of gender,
Mexican honor, and local allegiance for the benefit of the Mexican hegemonic actor and
his male heirs. What’s more, the hacienda functions as a physical and symbolic site both
for the execution of Santiago’s power and its increasing decadence following the arrival
of the Anglo male entrepreneurs.

Consider, for example, the narrator’s description of how “[t]he family and guests
came to Don Santiago [who] sat in the throne-like high carved chair in the middle of a
long wall. The seat of a master and a throne, in fact, for in the patriarchalism of custom

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53 Vincent Pérez contends that in *Caballero*, the hacienda functions as a “memory-place” that attests to the
“socioeconomic transformation that occurred with the arrival of modern capitalism in the Mexican
southwest” (*Remembering the Hacienda* 96).
he was king and his word law” (Caballero 14). Before the patriarch learns of the Guadalupe Hidalgo provisions, both he and the narrator correlate land possession with masculine power:

Here pride could have a man’s stature, here he was on a throne. He stood beside the cross, monarch of all he surveyed. To the north, the east, the south, pastures dipped and rolled and swelled in a mighty sea of green, finally to break into mists of blue against infinity of space ... as beckoning and beautiful this evening as it had been nearly a hundred years ago, when Don José Ramón had stood here and felt its call. Don Santiagos’s pride spread and burst in his chest, and he flung his arms wide. ‘Mine,’ he murmured. ‘All this that I can see, and far beyond, is mine and only mine’. Power was wine in his veins. Power was a figure that touched him, and pointed, and whispered. Those dots on the plain, cattle, sheep, horses, were his to kill or let live. The peons, down there, were his to discipline at any time with the lash, to punish by death if he so chose. His wife, his sister, sons, and daughters bowed to his wishes and came or went as he decreed. ‘Yours,’ said Power, pointing, ‘All yours!’ (33)

The hyperbolic exaltation of land possession coupled with the personification of Power in ambiguous terms configures the hacienda as the matrix from which Santiago’s claims to gendered power emerge. As Marci R. McMahon has observed, González deconstructs the hacienda space and its gendered prerogatives as part of a “colonial project of maintaining ‘Spanish’ honor, manhood, social status, and wealth” (“Politicizing Spanish-American Domesticity” 236). Perhaps more importantly, though, the hacienda serves as a physical
marker that foregrounds patriarchy and assures its perpetuation through rigid gender codes and semi-feudal social stratification.

In fact, the beginnings of the novel make clear that Santiago’s grandfather, the text’s first male patriarch, establishes the hacienda as a mechanism to preserve manly autonomy: “the reason they had come to this Indian-infested new land was to preserve the old ways and traditions of family life, safely away from the perfidious influence of Mexico City and the infiltration of foreign doctrine” (Caballero 20). The narrator adds, “Don José Ramón built this hacienda, and built it well and strong so generations would read families in it and keep it without change” (20). In spite of this aspired continuity, the patriarch’s recourse to the longstanding Mendoza legacy of class elitism and Spanish whiteness fails to resist the cultural and political changes that ensue Anglo encroachment. 55

In addition, readers should take note of how the hacienda’s isolation from the Mexican capital consolidates power to the family patriarch by affording near total immunity from Mexico City legislative oversight. 56 Because of these spatial restrictions,

54 Folklorist Américo Paredes notes similar phenomena in the historical record: “Most of the Border people did not live in the towns. The typical community was the ranch or the ranching village. Here lived small, tightly knit groups whose basic social structure was the family or the clan. The early settlements had begun as great ranches, but succeeding generations multiplied the number of owners of each of the original land grants. The earliest practice was to divide the grant among the original owner’s children. Later many descendants simply held the land in common, grouping their houses in small villages” (With His Pistol in His Hand 9).

55 In her article “The Unsustainable Hacienda,” Monika Kaup illuminates how Anglo-led farm developments catalyzed the transition from class consciousness to race consciousness: “Around 1900, then, race replaced class hierarchy as the dominant social distinction in South Texas: as the Anglo-Mexican ranch society was undermined by a segregated farm society, twentieth-century modern American formations of race and racism supplanted the nineteenth-century interethnic (but Mexican-based) politics of class and class oppression. Predictably, the fall of the ranch order and the farm developments on the South Texas border did not occur peacefully, but provoked an armed uprising by Texas-Mexicans in 1916, ended through bloody repression by Texas Rangers” (566).

56 Paredes observes, “The patriarchal system not only made the Border community more cohesive, by emphasizing its clanlike characteristics, but it also minimized outside interference, because it allowed the community to govern itself to a great extent” (With His Pistol in His Hand 12-13).
the hacienda allows Don Santiago to function as a metonymic presence of God the Father (with Whom, we should recall, he claims kinship). Indeed, as hegemonic authority, Santiago structures the lives of his subordinates through the perpetuation of normative gender scripts, the compulsions of Mexican honor and Spanish whiteness, and ultimately the confines of organized heteronormative marriage.

In spite of these deeply rooted gender roles and the spatial constraints in which they operate, the arrival of Anglo entrepreneurs ultimately precludes Don José Ramón’s aspiration to “keep it [the hacienda] without change” (Caballero 20). By examining the Mexican hacienda alongside Anglos’ appropriation of Texas, readers encounter a number of stark contrasts: the former is static, semi-feudal, and ensures a continuous trajectory of male-leadership through the privileges of posterity, Spanish whiteness, and class position. The latter, however, is dynamic, competitive, and privileges entrepreneurialism in such a way that social mobility supersedes the classist strictures that impede the agencies of both men and women.57

In one of the scenes that best reflects the intersection of space and gender, the Anglo entrepreneur Red McLane offers Don Santiago a new position as magistrado, reasoning that the latter will one day prove himself in the new Anglo social order: “you have personality and influence. Men look up to you and they will listen to you” (Caballero 181). Reduced from hidalgo (achieved through patrilineage) to magistrado (appointed by Anglo invaders), Santiago then receives Red’s warning that he will lose his land to East Coast squatters if he does not mark it according to American law. Red’s subsequent assurance that Santiago has “everything to gain and nothing to lose” and

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57 David Montejano argues that upper class Mexicans were divided in their response to Anglos: while some elite Mexican families overlooked Anglo-enacted abuses of lower class Mexicans, the rebellion of Juan Cortina Nepomuceno disturbed these loyalties (Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas 36).
platitudinal remark that “‘Mexico is rotten and is through with you’” (182) both assure us that the terrain of power is shifting to Anglo men.

**IV.C. Heteronormative Marriage, Blood Purity, and the Perpetuation of Mexican Patriarchy**

Just as Don Santiago enjoys his hegemonic position of power through patrilineage and the hacienda setting, he also mobilizes heteronormative marriage as a resource that reflects his authority and ensures the perpetuation of Mexican patriarchy. This engagement of sexual politics posits the female characters in conflicting roles: while they serve as moral paragons and sexual prizes, they simultaneously represent the feminine abject against which the male characters define their masculinities. Don Santiago, for one, experiences both annoyance and affection when seeing his wife, as the narrator affirms in chapter 1: “Don Santiago felt that swift jerk of frustration which the sight of her so often gave him, as if the self-effacing meekness and the faded thinness of her were a personal insult to him” (*Caballero* 4). In spite of his frustration, Santiago also uses women as necessary conduits for masculinity construction. The narrator’s comments affirm as much when describing his marriage to Doña María Petronilla: “In the twenty-five years of marriage to this man, she had fashioned only the armor of meekness to meet his dominance, and it gave her no protection ... She did not resent it. Such was the law according to her mother’s teaching and example” (26). Later, in chapter 8, the narrator echoes similar observations, revealing that Doña María “had been too frightened to show resentment against his domination in the early days of their marriage and had protected

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58 A similar situation occurs later in chapter 21 when the narrator reveals that “[t]he women had irritated him when they tried to please him in every way, now they irritated him more because they no longer tried to please him” (192).
herself with the armor of meek submission. But the resentment had never died and now it came to give her strength” (85). As these examples demonstrate, Caballero foregrounds the role of the female characters in paradoxical terms, both as the feminine abject (what a man must not be) and as objects of desire (sexual prizes whose subservience and productive capacities ensure the perpetuation of the Mendoza lineage).

These dual and competing roles also manifest themselves as Santiago attempts to arrange marriages for his sons and daughters. The case of the family’s eldest male heir, Alvaro, demonstrates the ties between heteronormative marriage and the perpetuation of Mexican patriarchy. As early as chapter 4, the narrator calls attention to Santiago’s desire to arrange Alvaro’s marriage to a woman who will reflect the family’s longstanding notions of honor (Caballero 36). Later, in chapter 11, Alvaro reveals to Santiago that he has found a woman whom he will force into marriage, a feat that in turn positions the eldest son on equal footing with his esteemed father: “‘You have said, papá that I must find a wife this winter ... and of course that is my duty. I have made my choice, and, if it pleases you I would like to have you ask for her.’ Don Santiago beamed. They were men together and at ease with each other” (110). The problematic revelation of the woman’s identity likewise thematizes how the degradation of women works to normalize and perpetuate these asymmetrical gender roles.

In the same chapter, Alvaro reveals to his father that he has chosen to marry Inez Sánchez—friend of his sister Susanita and a character who shares, like Susanita, romantic interest in Anglo men. Just as Susanita challenges the longstanding traditions of Mexican patriarchy in ways that ultimately estrange her from the Mendoza family altogether, so too does Inez express romantic desires that contradict the longstanding traditions of
Mexican patriarchy, thus ensuring her belittlement at the hands of Mexican men. Having previously been betrothed by her father to an elderly man, Inez laments her situation by reflecting on how Mexican patriarchy both abjects Mexican women and polices their sexuality. When speaking to Susanita, Inez reveals that should her father discover her romantic interest in an Anglo man, the former will either betroth her to another “‘old goat who is so tough he will never die’” (Caballero 82) or send her to a convent in Mexico City (83). Later, the narrator describes the inner thoughts of Inez by exposing how heteronormative marriage operates at polarizing extremes: for its male architects, the institution ensures a number of masculine privileges; the women, meanwhile, suffer marginalization and degradation in their roles as conduits for both masculinity construction and the public demonstration of Mexican male honor. When Alvaro confronts Inez with his intention to marry her, the narrator discloses that Inez “felt as if ropes were being thrown around her” (131), a revelation that reinforces the narrator’s earlier observations that between Alvaro and Santiago, “[i]t had not occurred to either one of them to consider what Inez might think about the marriage” (111). It comes as little surprise, then, that Santiago expresses reticence at his son’s decision to marry a woman who attempts to defy the very patriarchal system that ensures her subordination. Even so, his criticism reveals a sexual dimension that only furthers the objectification of women as conduits for masculinity construction.

In the same chapter, Santiago reveals that although Inez’s obstinacy, independence, and previous betrothment render her unfit for marriage, her character is nonetheless befitting for a future mistress (Caballero 110). Alvarez disagrees, arguing that the challenge of forcing her into wifely submission would reinforce his own male
power. In fact, when Alvarez sees Inez at the dance in chapter 9, the narrator reveals as much: “Inez came into view, and his heart pulsed at the prospect of taming her. His wife? The idea pleased him ... She would tell him she loved him whenever he wished her to, once she was his wife—*por Dios*, but he would tame her! And his wife she would be if he asked for her and her father approved, for she had no choice” (92). The juxtaposition of heterosexual marriage alongside the reduction of female agency allows us to explore how this longstanding gender order experiences rapid decadence as the Anglo characters challenge the sexual politics of Mexican patriarchy. In spite of the configuration of women as sexual objects and reproductive devices, the novel also represents them in more complex terms.

Throughout the narrative, the Mexican female characters’ performance of feminine virtue and their inculcation of virtue in others (that is, the Mendoza family) posit them as moral paragons in the household of Don the Father. Santiago’s position as overlord of the hacienda engraves his authority in social, economic, and religious terms, each informing and reinforcing the others. What’s more, his ability to coordinate marriages for his daughters further imbeds his claims to power by foregrounding their sexual activity as mechanisms that ensure blood purity and, thus, family honor. Shortly after affirming to his daughter Angela that he wishes the community to acknowledge her grace and gentility (*Caballero* 37), Santiago expresses a racialized contempt against the Anglo men—a sentiment that also configures Mexican women as guarantors of virtue and decency. In fact, after deriding the Americans’ for their attending mass (43), Santiago goes on to ridicule the Anglo men for having gazed upon his daughter, lamenting, “‘To me their very gaze upon a woman is a desecration of them’” (43). If Santiago indirectly
valorizes his daughters as delicate moral paragons, the imperative to maintain authority over their sexuality grows increasingly urgent as the narrative progresses. We read, for example, that with regards to Susanita, Santiago seeks for her a suitor “whose background fitted the voice” (85). Even so, this process proves difficult for the patriarch: “The young men of our group seem like water milk at times to me,’’ he laments, later adding, “Someone virile yet of good family, why can I not find him?” (85). The text’s preoccupation with pedigree, on the one hand, and masculine virility, on the other, fetters questions of masculinity performance to the perpetuation of this long-standing, male-supervised tradition.59

The marriages between the patriarch’s daughters and the Anglo men, however, problematize these masculine privileges, entailing a series of deviations that embattle Santiago in gendered terms. In a rare moment that defies the patriarch’s typical stoicism, Santiago cries out of frustration in chapter 24 after learning of Susanita’s love for the Anglo entrepreneur “Red” McLane (Caballero 234). In an attempt to prevent this future marriage, the patriarch accepts the proposal from his friend Gabriel del Lago, who hopes to marry Susanita in spite of her love for the Anglo invader. Santiago, however, soon realizes the futility of these aspirations by reasoning that the arrangement would leave both suitors unhappy--a rare moment of compassion that the patriarch then eschews, fearing that it has rendered him emotional and weak (282). As the patriarch himself explains to his female critics, “You are women ... You can have the relief of showing your misery. Even that is denied me, I must be the stern patriarch, unfeeling, as if I had no father’s heart. You are weak women, and do not know how blessed it is to be weak”

59 Paredes notes that such a preoccupation characterized Spanish-Mexican nobility, who considered themselves “bloodier [in pedigree] and therefore manlier” (With His Pistol in His Hand 20).
While these examples demonstrate the necessity of heterosexual marriage for the maintenance of pedigree and patriarchy, the novel’s representation of Don Santiago here attests to a crisis in Mexican masculinity construction. Whereas the initial strongholds of geographical isolation, class position, racial purity, and the traditions of patriarchy configure Santiago as a hegemonic actor, the Anglo men ultimately disturb these privileges in ways that the Mexican patriarch cannot combat.

V. Male Honor and Family Legacy

V.A. Introduction

This study has so far demonstrated how the intersection of space and sexual politics works to preserve and advance the privileges of Mexican patriarchy in Caballero. Though this process largely benefits the text’s hegemonic presence, Don Santiago, it also fractures to the point of total collapse following the arrival of the novel’s entrepreneurial Anglo men. This operation, in turn, reverses the tides of gendered privilege by benefiting, however limitedly, the text’s Mexican women in their new roles as spouses. In order to better understand both the tensions that underpin this process and the compulsions that compel it altogether, readers must examine the interrelated notions of male honor and family legacy as they are represented in Caballero. While Don Santiago exerts considerable energy to arrange marriages for his children, the imperatives that drive this process also evidence the patriarch’s consciousness regarding public performance: readers notice that just as normative gender and sex roles structure the lives of individual actors in the private sphere, so too do the notions of male honor and family legacy
necessitate public accountability and validation in order to substantiate the Mendoza males’ gender identities.\(^{60}\)

In fact, when questions of racial purity and class elitism do not inform the positions of the Mexican patriarch, male honor fills the void. As early as chapter 3 Santiago affirms, “Rather would I bury my girls ... than see them married to an Americano” (Caballero 29). Male honor prevents Santiago from interrupting the ball when Warrener asks to dance with Susanita, just as it prompts Santiago’s shame when Alvaro confronts the Anglo in a formal setting (93). The narrator’s revelation of his wife’s thoughts acknowledges how Alvaro’s compromising of hidalgo etiquette impinges upon Santiago’s own masculine standing among the community: “Dolores thought. Yes, that was it hitting his pride; that was the shame, that his son was the lesser man” (98). When several other elite Mexican men profess loyalty to the Anglo authorities, Santiago correlates their betrayal to a retrogression of manly pride: “[H]as fat living put your manhood to sleep? While Mexico bleeds, while her men die to keep out the invaders, you feat and dance and listen to lying Americanos and talk about betraying your honor to them!” (122). In spite of these initial disturbances and the increasing presence of the Anglo men, Santiago remains resolute in his refusal to compromise the duties attendant to male honor—a compulsion that the woman characters neither experience nor defend. Later in the text, for example, when Dolores criticizes the patriarch’s attitude toward Anglos as unrealistic, Santiago safeguards these masculine compulsions by affirming a

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\(^{60}\) Historian Ramón A. Gutiérrez makes a similar observation in his book chapter, “Conclusion: Mexican Masculinities”: “While in the nineteenth century honor was the collective ideology of social personhood that defined a person’s place in a hierarchically organized society, prescribing ideal gender norms for what was deemed masculine and feminine, by the beginning of the twentieth century ... honor had been complicated by a sense that what was most important in life was that one should be gente decente, or decent people” (Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico 270)
dichotomy between the prudent Mexican men and the flippant Mexican women: “‘A woman thinks she can compromise with honor, but a man knows he cannot’” (200). The question of male honor becomes even more pressing. In fact, rather than diminish in light of Anglo encroachment, male honor acquires significant relevance as the novel reaches its conclusion. The patriarch’s recourse to the maintenance of family honor in chapter 35 affirms as much, establishing a near religious affinity between the compulsions of sexual politics (masculine duty, female subservience) and the patrilineal cultural framework in which they operate: “‘Our faith, customs, and traditions,’” Santiago claims, “‘are rooted in our honor which I at least find to be my duty before God to treasure and uphold. You as my wife should have stayed by my side encouraging and helping me instead of siding with the enemy’” (321). These same masculine preoccupations intimate a connection with his two male heirs: Alvaro and Luis Gonzaga.

Several critics have underscored the contrasts separating the two brothers. Whereas Alvaro emulates his father by recourse to sexual promiscuity, physical violence, and racial purism, his brother Luis embodies an ethos of passivity, sexual abstinence, and artistic proclivity that puts him at odds with the hyper-masculine performances of his brother and father.61 These distinctions acquire additional relevance as the novel progresses, configuring the Mexican men who refuse to relinquish their patriarchal strongholds (like Alvaro) as irrelevant, while ensuring greater opportunity (as in the case of Luis) for the men who negotiate or transgress the boundaries of these gender codes. The following sections will examine how these masculine strictures manifest themselves in each of the two Mendoza male heirs, how each affirms or resists such compulsions,

61 In chapter 15, the narrator reveals the thoughts of doña Petronilla with regards to her eldest son and his reverence of his father: “She knew there was no way of reaching to the heart of Alvaro for he had never belonged to her, his loyalties and affection having always been given to his father” (Caballero 141).
and in what ways each incorporates or elides violence and nationalism when met with Anglo immigration.

V.B. Alvaro Gonzaga: Guardian of a Hypermasculine Tradition

In his article “Culture, Gender, and Violence”, psychiatrist James Gilligan argues, “To understand physical violence we must understand male violence, since most violence is committed by males, and on other males. And we can only understand male violence if we understand the sex roles, or gender roles, into which males are socialized by the gender codes of their particular cultures” (543). Whereas several of the text’s female characters enjoy greater social mobility following the arrival of the Anglo male entrepreneurs, the same cannot be said for many of the Mexican men. Santiago’s male heir, Alvaro Gonzaga, is but one example. If the compulsions that inform the Mexican system of male honor compel the family patriarch to undertake physical violence and male dominance as mechanisms to preserve a cultural order, these same prerogatives hold equally valid implications for his son, Alvaro, whom patrilineage has designated to continue this male trajectory.

The alert reader notices that throughout the narrative, the actions of Alvaro parallel those of his equally temperamental and privileged father. Alvaro derides the parish priest as a “‘gringo lover’” (Caballero 63), belittles women by comparing the ubiquity of his potential lovers to wild flowers ripe for the picking (65), affirms the preeminence of his family’s bloodline (“Blood of conquerors runs through our veins!” 15), and he often echoes his father’s racial antagonisms concerning the Anglo men. When Alvaro confronts Warrener at the dance in chapter 9, for example, he remarks, “‘I could kill you like a dog, Americano, but a Mexican caballero never does that’” (94). While
Santiago privately rebukes Alvaro for compromising the ethics of Mexican male honor, the foregoing remark nonetheless affirms the heir’s consciousness of such obligations. Perhaps of all the similarities linking patriarch to male heir, Alvaro’s own recourse to physical violence best demonstrates the compulsion to preserve an increasingly threatened cultural order.

As early as chapter 5 when the presence of the Anglo men is first announced, Alvaro demands the use of physical violence against them, invoking family honor and masculine necessity: “‘the Mendozas, the Sorías, know no defeat! Fight, I say! Death to the gringo! Why do we wait? Why do we gather and talk like women when we should be stalking and killing them?’” (Caballero 51). These compulsions to enact violence as a safeguard for family honor soon gain validation from the family patriarchy. In chapter 13, Santiago, speaking to his wife, commends Alvaro accordingly: “‘This is a proud day for me, Petronilla. Alvaro leaves us to war against the enemy’” (126), a position he later echoes by affirming the necessity of violence in order to preserve the family’s honor (127). In fact, the narrator’s ensuing descriptions of Santiago’s interaction with his eldest son foreground physical violence as a licit and compulsory practice that reflects the urgency of protecting this imagined, and ever more threatened, Mexican community:

[I]n Don Santiago all the savagery that was twisted into black hatred for the Americans, all the high-minded pride willed him by two aristocratic families and come to fullest bloom in him [had] blotted out all thought of Rancho La Palma, all sanity. He dug fingers in his son’s arm. ‘Yes, you shall go, for your honor and for mine. Now indeed it is a duty.’ (140)
Throughout the text, physical violence operates for Alvaro as a necessary tool that forestalls any compromise of sexual politics, family honor, and the Mexican patriarchy in which both take root. The compulsions attendant to Mexican honor thus position Alvaro as an ardent guardian of a hypermasculine tradition that he has inherited and consistently defends to the delight of his father. Whereas the beginnings of the novel witness Alvaro constructing a masculine code along the lines of class entitlement and racial purity, the advent of Anglo immigration compels the Mendoza heir to increasingly resort to physical violence in order to preserve these Mexican male privileges. The affirmations of the community’s leading Mexican men affirm as much, offering a series of reactionary discourses that qualify masculinity in militaristic terms.

In chapter 13, General Antonio Canales, an historical character who led Mexican guerilla fighters, chastises the Mexican men, correlating their self-indulgence, polyamory, and disinterest in national defense with the decline of the Mexican nation:

‘You who spend your time riding aimlessly to show what fine caballeros you are, thinking only of love making and the pleasures of life, while your country lies bleeding at your fine-booted feet. Torn and wounded she writhes in agony, trampled by the infamous avarice of the invaders who are never satisfied in their lust for wealth while you ... content yourself with hating them, riding past their camp and spitting at it like children. Why didn’t one of you kill the one who came to your dance, whey haven’t you young men taken it upon yourselves to kill this McLane whose devil tongue wins over your fathers.’ (Caballero 122)

Rather than foreground masculinity within the confines of ceremonial pomp and privilege, Canales fetters questions of normative masculinity to a call for national
defense. The strategy succeeds, prompting Santiago to admit, “‘[W]e have been losing our manhood indeed’” (123), thus ensuring a transmutation in the traditional masculine performance of the Mexican elite. Assuring that he can “‘save Mexico [and] the border on which [Mexicans] live,’” Canales demands “‘[y]oung men of daring and courage ... who are loyal to their people, who hate invaders’” (123). By doing so, Canales gauges physical violence as resource that will both demonstrate the manliness of its practitioners while simultaneously ensuring the continuity of this imagined male community. These examples foreground masculinity as a mechanism for cultural preservation, and gender roles likewise inform the treatment of family honor, as when Alvaro finds himself in the opposite setting as the recipient of violence at the hands of Anglo men.

In chapter 29, Alvaro scolds Susanita for compromising female domesticity in her attempt to try and save her brother from execution. Rather than comply with his sister’s schemes (a process that would ultimately spare him from death), Alvaro invokes a cross-section of gendered provisions (domestic space, blood purity, classism, and national allegiance) that recasts her charitable actions as dangerous concessions from the family’s male-supervised code of honor:

“‘When I saw you, you, sitting alone in a room of men—how did you come here?

When? ... Riding all night alone with a peon, you a Mendoza y Soria! Going to a soldier camp, riding with them, consorting with them, alone! Couldn’t you let me die instead? It would have been an honor to our name, dying for my people and my country, now you have dishonored us forever.’ (Caballero 270)

The disregard for the female characters’ insights does not limit itself to the family’s male heir. In fact, fourteen chapters earlier, a similar situation arises between the war-hungry
patriarch and his pragmatic wife regarding Alvaro’s call to war. Whereas Santiago advocates the use of physical violence against Anglos at any cost, Petronilla advocates a more disciplined approach—one that aligns itself with notions of proper masculinity construction in order to sway her husband’s increasingly reckless ideas. Affirming that Alvaro “needs discipline, not lawlessness, to make him a man” (141), Petronilla criticizes the call to guerrilla warfare in gendered terms: “The boys will only learn cruelties and vices, and those who come back will never be as they should be. It will be bad for the girls they marry and the families they raise ... If you say no, none of them will go. Keep them here, don’t let their blood drain out in Mexico, or their manliness die” (126).  

The examples cited here qualify Caballero’s representation of Mexican honor as an ideological matrix that preserves the family’s patriarchal sexual politics, while also safeguarding obedience to these provisions through the threat of shame or ostracism. The objectification of women as sexual prizes and moral paragons advances a dichotomy that stigmatizes the Mexican characters who attempt to challenge these strictures by acting outside the confines of prescribed gender roles. As we will soon see, the Anglo men aid the patriarch’s daughters in their attempts to achieve greater autonomy, but the Mexican men largely fail to adapt to these new provisions, fighting for an imagined Mexican community that becomes increasingly imaginative and progressively less Mexican.  

V.C. Luis Gonzaga: Foreclosing Mexican Patriarchy through ‘Feminine’ Artistry

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62 In this regard, José E. Limón remarks, “Alvaro and other warrior heroes are represented in less-than-flattering terms, and patriarchy and armed violence have no place in a symbolic map for the twentieth century. The effect would have been to relieve the Anglo liberals of some of their guilt so that they would join the project of consolidation” (“Mexicans, Foundational Fictions” 350)  
63 Monika Kaup interprets “Caballero’s dismissal of the male warrior as the hero of ‘his’ Mexican people” as a mechanism that “clears discursive space for a new type of leadership, prefiguring contemporary Chicana feminism, which attacks Chicano nationalism for preserving Mexican traditions of males as natural leaders” (“The Unsustainable Hacienda” 569)
This study has previously explored the characteristics that cast Luis Gonzaga as the masculine antithesis to his violent, temperamental, and sexually promiscuous elder brother, Alvaro. Nicknamed “la marica” by his father,64 Luis also poses a threat to the patriarch—and, thus, the family’s honor—because of his inability to perform the Mendoza male script. Luis eschews physical violence and polyamory in favor of friendship with an Anglo man and their shared bond of art appreciation. Throughout the novel, Luis’s transgression of these masculine norms offsets the authority of his father by reconfiguring masculine desire through the union (professional or otherwise) with another male. The fact that Luis’s artistic partner (and possible lover) is also Anglo only further sabotages these masculine prerogatives by threatening the family’s rootedness in the hacienda. In fact, Luis’s decision to ultimately leave the hacienda to study art in Baltimore upends his father’s capacity to control the life of his youngest son, but the departure also entails a more important development when considered in conjunction with the death of the elder brother: that is, the impossibility of continuing the Mendoza name. Just as Santiago’s hegemonic control over his family’s social relations erodes in light of capitalist expansion, so too does the hacienda weaken as the site of Mexican patriarchy.

As early as chapter 4, the authors represent the younger brother’s deviance from the hyper-masculine Mendoza code in sexual terms, deriding him as a homosexual who threatens the family’s namesake by compromising proper male conduct:

‘[T]he marica! Eighteen and without an affair, never even kissing the servant girls he sketched. He sighed. Perhaps Luis might still be a man, given time. But there would be no more indulgent waiting for Alvaro, nor for Susanita. Neither for

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64 “La marica” is a derogatory Spanish-language term used to identify a male individual whom many believe to be homosexual, or who is perceived to deviate from an accepted masculine script.
Angela. Let them talk of love all they wanted to. He would let it be known ... that the house of Menodza y Soría had an ear for proposals.’ (38)

Here, the patriarch appeals to the community at large, linking proper masculine performance with both social validation and the continuation of his family’s namesake. This male trajectory demands a future-oriented lens in terms of marriage and posterity, and the text even invokes the patriarch’s ancestors to reinforce the deeply rooted nature of this tradition. This commemoration establishes an imagined community with the living and the dead, foregrounding proper masculine performance as a mechanism that reifies this process altogether.

In chapter 11, Luis complains to Susanita in ways that acknowledge the limitations of these normative gender regimes: “‘Susanita,’” he affirms, “‘you know there is nothing for any of us except what papá wills, don’t you?’” (Caballero 108). Later, in chapter 17, Padre Pierre’s juxtaposition of Luis’s interest in art (a decidedly feminine characteristic) alongside the patriarch’s reverence of the Mendoza dead (idols possessing the manly virtues that Luis himself lacks) establishes a link between the imagined community for which the Mexican men fight and the masculine performances that tradition compels them to uphold: “Don Santiago comes from a family noted for individuality and courage, his wife is far from stupid, yet he expects their offspring to be a flock of sheep that follow a bell he rings. He treasures the portraits of ancestors, and contemptuously calls his artist son a woman, a marica” (157). The arrival of the Anglo men conduces an additional tension that also manifests itself in gendered terms.

Even though Luis defies the masculine performances of his brother and father, it is helpful to recall that even he initially echoes their racial antipathy toward Anglos.
Later, Captain Devlin’s professed love of art absolves these antagonisms, and the narrator’s description of this process exposes the anxieties that ensue Luis’s masculine deviance:

The old loneliness within him was a new wound ... Beyond his pride had been the urge to respond to the invitation in Warrener’s eyes and sit and talk with him awhile ... For a moment—a happy, expanding moment—he had had a feeling that he had belonged. That he would not have been considered peculiar and effeminate, as his family and those his age saw him to be, he felt certain. Nor would he have been scorned for his artistry, as others scorned him. Luis Gonzaga, had he followed his inclination, would have thrown himself upon the ground and wept like a child. Wept for the beautiful thing which had been laid in his hand and he had thrown away. (Caballero 104)

A critical scene in chapter 17 showcases an evolution from masculine deviance into conscious defiance, for it is here when Luis departs with Captain Devlin, the man with whom he shares artistic sympathies. Regarding this particular scene, José E. Limón remarks that “the arts and homoerotic sensibilities have no place in an emerging, highly masculinized Texas for either Anglos or Mexicans” (“Nations, Regions, and Mid-Nineteenth Century Texas” 106). Readers should also remain conscious of how this shared bond surpasses both figurative and literal borders, as when the narrator affirms, “They were neither Mexicans nor Anglo Saxon but artists” (156). This devotion to art (a counter-masculine operation for the Mexican patriarch) displaces racial antagonisms and Mexican male duty, giving primacy instead to the ephemeral notion of a natural beauty that transgresses the borders of national allegiance and gender normativity. In addition, it
signals a permeability regarding masculinity performance altogether—one that Luis achieves only by virtue of his homosocial (and possibly homosexual) relationship with the Anglo, Captain Devlin.

While the eldest son must uphold his father’s legacy through the continuation of hacienda-based patriarchy and the physical violence against its Anglo aggressors, Luis compromises these long-standing traditions through an allegedly feminine operation.\(^6\) The younger son’s acceptance of the Anglos’ offers to study art in Baltimore signals a porosity in terms of these masculine strictures. Whereas the other Mexican men oppose the specter of femininity, the Anglo men demonstrate a receptivity that welcomes both flexibility (for Luis) and limited gender egalitarianism (for the Mendoza daughters, as we shall soon see). When the patriarch learns of Luis’s defiance, he extols patrilineage and invokes the imagined community of the Mendoza dead:

‘I, your father, command you to learn the things you must. I command you to be a ranchero as I am, as was your grandfather and his father before him. Your task begins today. As soon as you get home you will destroy those childlike things with which you amuse yourself, you will burn all your paints and crayons. This is my final commandment.’ (\textit{Caballero} 197)

The recourse to this imagined male community in conjunction with the imperatives of manly duty cast Luis’s deviance as a loss in masculine investment on the part of the patriarch. The metonymic association that Luis shares with his father assures readers that

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\(^6\) Garza-Falcón takes note of this contrast, remarking that while Alvaro, like his father, is “violent, undisciplined, and tyrannical in his sexual abuse of the daughters of the peones,” he also “stands in contrast to Luis Gonzaga, the second and effeminate son, who ... must bear the constant criticism of his father [that] a ‘man’ can only become a man in his image, only through the path taken by his oldest son” (\textit{Gente Decente} 117).
any negotiation of these masculine strictures, or any defiance to the patriarchal authority from which they emerge, entails a reduction of the father’s own masculinity. As the narrator explains, “[T]he real issue was not his consorting with an American, or even his leaving; the issue was a test of the mastership of his father over his family” (197). The continued encroachment of the Anglo male characters, of course, only complicates this process.

VI. “A people who never sit still”: The Ambivalent Roles of Anglo Men and the Prerogatives of White Capitalist Citizenship

VI.A. Introduction

In her study of the U.S.-Mexican War, historian Amy S. Greenburg writes that the war itself was “America’s first war against another republic” and that it “decisively broke with the past, shaped the future, and to this day affects how the United States acts in the world,” adding that it also gauged “what it meant to prove one’s manhood in the nineteenth-century” (A Wicked War xiii). Historian David Maxwell Brown would likely agree. In his article “Violence,” Brown posits Anglo male honor as an ideological nexus that informed the management and deployment of physical violence during nineteenth-century westward expansion (“Violence” 394-95). Written roughly eight decades after the war in question, Caballero, as we have seen, narrativizes the anxieties endemic to the erosion of Mexican patriarchy at the onset of Anglo-led capitalist expansion shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Rather than thematize the compulsions that inform a code of Anglo male honor, however, the text’s representation of masculine anxieties largely concerns the Mexican male characters. The Mexican patriarch, we

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66 Brown elaborates his thesis in his article “Western Violence: Structure, Values, Myth,” in which he examines how the abandonment of British legal codes forged new processes by which Anglo men enacted physical violence.
recall, operates as a static character whose inflexibility ultimately results in his demise. The novel’s representation of its Anglo male characters, however, is much more complex.

Other scholars have taken note of this dynamic. Leticia M. Garza-Falcón, for one, affirms that as “officers and gentlemen ... of good breeding, vision, and culture,” both Robert Warrener and “Red” McLane “are not the Webbian pioneers of the Great Plains” and, as such, each demonstrates respect for Mexican culture (Gente Decente 123). Javier Rodríguez echoes similar sentiments, contrasting both Anglo men to the Mexican patriarch by casting the former as “more like border-crossing globalized elites than torch-carrying nationalists” (“Caballero’s Global Continuum” 133). Rodríguez adds that while the Anglo male characters possess “roles as invaders and sexual conquerors” and while “[b]oth men are bearers of United States power and domination,” they simultaneously “become somewhat Mexicanized ... even as they set about Anglicizing their trophy wives” (133-4). The qualifier “somewhat” is key. As readers notice, the text’s representation of Anglo men consistently casts them in ambivalent, at times contradictory, terms.67

A scholar of Texas history and folklore, González casts the novel’s Anglo male characters in ways that both acknowledge the racism of the historical period in question while simultaneously avoiding simple binaries that would foreclose character

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67 While this chapter examines the roles of Warrener and McLane, much can also be said of the Caballero’s paradoxical representation of Texas Rangers, who are described as “men whose sole virtue was a daring courage” in chapter 3 (22), as “‘strong, powerful, [and] fearless’” but lacking “dignity, self-respect, pride, nobility, [and] traditions’” in chapter 5 (54), as adventurers “for whom killing was a lust” in chapter 29 (267), as “‘devils from hell itself’” in chapter 32 (301), and finally as compassionate and reasonable individuals in chapter 19 (182).
development altogether. In fact, as early as chapter three, the narrator posits a cross-section of hostilities between Anglos and Mexicans that culminates in disputed border demarcations and the contentious status of Anglo capital accumulation:

Trouble kindled the fire beneath a pot where simmered racial antagonisms, religious fantacisms, wrongs fancied and wrongs real—and brought it from the simmer to boiling, up to the edge and spilling over. The adventurer, the outlaw, the siftings of the East, came to the new state, and each took what suited his individual fancy. Mexicans were killed for a cow or horse, for no reason at all. The Texans, grabbing the spoils, fixed the southern boundary of the state at the Río Grande and marked it down with the black of gunpowder and the red of blood. The Mexicans marked it the Río Nueces and harassed the invaders of what they considered Mexican territory. (Caballero 22)

This section proposes that the text’s lead Anglo male characters function as complicit actors of an imperialistic project at the same time that they operate as agents who foster greater (albeit limited) autonomy for their Mexican brides. These characters advance territorial expansion, and in doing so they also fetter questions of legitimate citizenship to the co-constituting domains of Anglo whiteness and capitalist entrepreneurialism. By doing so, they affirm the superiority of a new social order over which these same male characters operate as hegemonic actors.

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68 Warrener’s southern heritage is by no means gratuitous. Historian Neil Foley writes, “The War with Mexico also made possible the extension of southern culture into the borderlands of what had been the northern states of Mexico. After the war, as white Americans rushed to California to find gold and to Texas to buy cheap land, they brought with them the creed of white racial supremacy that had devastating consequences for the Mexicans, Indians, and Chinese whom they would encounter in the newly acquired American Southwest” (The White Scourge 21-2).
*Caballero* showcases a linear progression for the decadence of Mexican patriarchy and the increasing autonomy of the Mexican female characters, but the representation of Anglo men follows no such trajectory. In fact, the Anglo men consistently find themselves in conflicting positions both as imperialists and as well-intentioned ‘border-crossers’ who ensure greater independence for those suffering the ill effects of Mexican patriarchy. As early as chapter 1, the American men are cast as land thieves (Gabriel del Lago: “‘All this land has been taken by them—all of it, everything!’” 8), racial inferiors (Dolores: “‘We do not choose to be [dirty] Americanos. We are Mexicans, our mother land was Spain’” 9), religious heretics (“‘I cannot understand how God allowed [these Americanos] here in our country at all, seeing He is Catholic like we are’” 10), and as avaricious, border-crossing entrepreneurs (“‘[T]hey will see that the boundary stays there [at the Rio Grande], for their greed knows no end; they will fight until the river runs red with blood for the land above it’” 11). In spite of these damning descriptions, chapter 11 witnesses a partial, if not entirely problematic, vindication of the Anglos’ expansionistic agenda by representing expansion itself as natural to the Anglo condition. Speaking to Luis, Captain Devlin derides the actions of the Mexican government under Santa Ana if only to immediately acknowledge the abuses of his own people: “‘If your people—but, no, there is too much that is wrong on the side of the Americans, much that is disgraceful. Let me simply say that we are a people who never sit still’” (107). By chapter 32, however, the text qualifies the Anglo male characters once again as irresolute imperialists who “roamed over the land in groups ... Building dreams of empire. Not caring---too many of them not caring that homes had stood here for a hundred years” (301). In spite of these ambivalent, and at times damning, descriptions,
Robert Warrener and Alfred “Red” McLane, the two Anglo male protagonists, defy simple binaries altogether, crossing both literal and figurative borders as their ambivalent positions emerge from, and reinforce, their roles as entrepreneurs in the recently annexed borderlands. By constructing these masculine identities accordingly, the authors expose how capitalist entrepreneurialism intersects with the political category of whiteness. The authors configure both men as conduits for a cleverly enshrouded syncretic agenda that neutralizes racial antagonisms without conceding the privileges of white capitalist citizenship.

VI.B. Robert Warrener: “Whiteness” as Entrepreneurial Pragmatism and Capital Accumulation

Conversing with Dolores in chapter 22, Warrener imagines the future of the syncretic borderlands, qualifying the process as increasingly egalitarian in terms of gender roles: “I see a great field for doing good,” he affirms, “for women perhaps more than men” (Caballero 209). Though the women continue to operate within asymmetrical relations of power after their marriages to their Anglo husbands, the sentiment nonetheless acknowledges a key rationale separating the Mexican men from their Anglo rivals. Past critics have interpreted the role of Warrener in diverse ways. Some, for example, have argued that he operates as a catalyst for an incipient Mexican-American social order, with his marriage to Susanita qualifying the text as a type of “foundational fiction” by resolving Anglo-Mexican conflict through heterosexual matrimony (Limón “Mexicans, Foundational Fictions” 347; Kaup “The Unsustainable Hacienda” 564). José E. Limón adds that Warrener represents “a United States South that is deeply implicated in mid-nineteenth-century global relationship of cotton and slavery” (“Nations, Regions, and Mid-Nineteenth Century Texas” 109). Javier Rodríguez, meanwhile, observes that
Warrener’s plantation heritage likens him to the background of his future Mexican father-in-law ("Caballero’s Global Continuum" 133-34). Although critics have correctly underscored the symbolic promises of such cultural syncretism, the masculine codes that compel these processes altogether have not garnered significant attention. This section proposes that Warrener functions as a catalyst for the deconstruction of anti-Anglo stereotypes, and that, through his paradoxical dual roles as invader and emancipator, he both fosters increasing autonomy for his Mexican bride while ultimately circumscribing it through the duties of white capitalist citizenship. Rather than engage the politics of whiteness in the vein of his Mexican father-in-law, Warrener affixes whiteness to entrepreneurial pragmatism and capital accumulation in ways that allow him to supersede Santiago’s hegemonic seat of power. Susanita, meanwhile, conforms to her domestic role as a spouse and mother, thus configuring her as a conduit to her husband’s masculine performances.

Readers notice that although the novel’s men (both Anglo and Mexican) emphasize their respective masculine duties, the Anglo men demonstrate a cultural adaptability, however limited and at times superficial, that counters the Mexican patriarch’s calls for cultural purism. The narrator describes Warrener as an officer of the American army stationed at Fort Brown who had left his Virginian slave-run plantation in order to avoid his forthcoming marriage to his fiancé (Caballero 45). Mexico, he explains, was the only way out--an admission that brings to mind the claims, such as those of Michael Kimmel (Manhood in America 60) and Amy S. Greenberg (Manifest Manhood 20), that for many Anglo men in the nineteenth century, going west functioned as a type of safety valve that diminished the anxieties immanent to their East Coast
responsibilities. Warrener’s romantic interest in Susanita creates a series of obstacles for many of the Mexican characters as they grapple with their longstanding opposition to Anglos and their receptivity toward Warrener’s gentlemanly conduct. Readers soon notice that this about-face works to the advantage of Warrener’s own masculine pragmatism.69

In fact, just as the text emphasizes Warrener’s pedigree and social standing, it also calls readers’ attention to his entrepreneurial adaptability. In chapter 24, the narrator describes Warrener in such terms: “He was the son of a gentleman, citizen of a country that, with all its faults, was built with the bricks of courage and democracy. He was a man after his mate, and he meant to have her” (Caballero 226). In the same chapter, Warrener attempts to gain Santiago’s approval with respect to marrying Susanita, and he does so by contrasting his own entrepreneurial autonomy to the strictures of ancestral tradition and Mexican patriarchy: “I know you consider it important, though personally I believe that a man’s worth should be measured by what he himself is regardless of his forbearers” (229). Warrener’s pragmatism becomes more evident when he affirms that, in addition to a number of other concessions, he is also willing to become Catholic (230). Ultimately, Warrener’s sexual attraction to Mexican women, willingness to compromise his own religious code, and alleged disavowal of his respective military duties all work to damn the Anglo in the eyes of his would-be Mexican father-in-law, as the latter’s comments affirm:

69 While this study affirms a capitalist pragmatism in the masculine performances of both of the novel’s Anglo male characters, Vincent Pérez reminds readers that the relationship between Susanita and Warrener “contrasts markedly with the pragmatic union of Angela and Red” (Remembering the Hacienda 95). Warrener, Pérez argues, possesses many of the qualities “that early in the novel are associated with the hacienda oligarchy” (103).
‘[T]his one with his pretensions of breeding; this upstart of a family of upstarts; this traitor to the uniform he wore; this weakling too spineless to hate an enemy; this presume, daring to look at a girl so far above him; this braggart boasting of his money; this spawner of bastards hiding his lechery behind noble talk of love; this infidel who would defile the Faith by his lying embrace of it; this thief, murder, barbarian—Sangre de Cristo, asking for the daughter of Santiago de Mendoza y Soría! (230)

The novel forces readers to confront an Anglo-Mexican dichotomy, the numerous contrasts of which reflect divergent understandings of masculine duties. Throughout the text, Warrener performs his masculinity by adopting Mexican elements (Catholicism, the Spanish language) that in turn allow him to attain social and political clout in the recently acquired borderlands. Rather than condemn Warrener’s actions as colonial interventions, the authors incorporate his cultural concessions in order to configure him as a conduit for the novel’s syncretic vision.

In the domain of sexual politics, this binary also holds particular relevance. The narrator’s description of Warrener’s thoughts regarding the ill effects of Mexican patriarchy on women showcase the former’s consciousness of cultural conflict in gendered terms: “He knew how the high-class Mexican families raised their daughters, beset with inhibitions and all independence snuffed out before it could grow ... The few that braved the iron-bound conventions brought swift punishment and even death upon themselves unless a twist of circumstance saved them” (Caballero 274). The novel’s parish priest shares similar sentiments. Celibate, of French origin, and opposed to the physical violence by both the Mexican and Anglo combatants, Padre Pierre extols the
promises of the Anglos’ presence, which he qualifies in masculinist terms: “If I could make Susanita’s father see that this union would be a great thing; if I could show him that yours is the more virile race now and that Texas will never again be ruled by the Mexicans; that for him and for all like him the mind must be made to rule the individual above that of the heart, and the mind must not be retroactive” (authors’ emphasis 158).

The legitimacy of Anglo presence and the necessity of Mexican subordination are fettered to the masculine virility of the former and the effemeness of the latter. The dynamism of this anticipated new socio-economic order (capitalist, Mexican-Anglo) ensures the perpetuation of a “virile race” that opposes both Mexican patriarchy and the stasis of the hacienda.

Ultimately, Warrener’s racial-social pedigree allows the text to transmute “white” elite privilege from one socio-economic order (the static semi-feudalism of the Mexican hacienda) to another (an Anglo-led market capitalism). By doing so, the text reconfigures the political category of whiteness. In spite of their paternalistic privileges and race-class entitlements, the Mexican men issue stinging criticisms of their Anglo male counterparts, often for the latter’s allegedly racial and cultural inferiority, but at other times (see Santiago’s most recent comments) in response to more substantive transgressions, including land theft, the cheapening of Catholic fidelity, and the betrayal of military duties. Like the dual roles of their Anglo male protagonists, the authors’ position here is an ambivalent one, emerging in response to their own historical period and its at times

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70 The comments made here share strong parallels with the nineteenth-century prejudices rampant along the borderlands and beyond. Historian Arnoldo de León, for one, has argued that “[t]hroughout the [nineteenth] century, whites spoke of Mexican docility, ignorance, decadence, mediocrity, antagonism toward work, submission to vice, and hedonistic proclivities. Mexicans seemed a culturally wanton people” (They Called Them Greasers 24). Furthermore, according to de León, “Anglos used Mexicans as counter images to measure their own moral standard--especially where it concerned sexuality” (39).
vitriolic political discourses. If the writers’ agenda is indeed progressive, as B.J. Manríquez claims, for its “‘dismantling’ of [Mexican] patriarchy” (“Argument in Narrative” 177), it is likely that the writers were also forced to negotiate their approach through an ambivalent operation: preserving a capitalist Anglo male order without representing it as a simple catalyst for abuses against Mexicans. The novel’s progression emerges both from this tension and the cross-border romances between its male protagonists and the Mexican women.

VI.C. Alfred “Red” McLane: Constructing Masculinity as Pragmatic Entrepreneurialism

Throughout Caballero, readers encounter several narrative tensions that reflect social stratification, racial antagonisms, and dueling socio-economic frameworks that embattle the characters both in personal questions of identity construction and in the larger configurations of cultural and national belonging. Both of these micro and macro processes, however, entail gender imperatives—that is, how the male and female characters must act amongst themselves in accordance with their perceived gender roles, and as allegiants to opposing national communities. While the Mexican men, as we have seen, largely resist Anglo presence and its ensuing socio-economic changes by hailing the duties of male honor and the sanctity of patrilineage, the Anglo male characters construct their masculinities through an ethos of pragmatic entrepreneurialism. In spite of the fact that the text often represents the two principle Anglo male characters as invaders and colonizers, it also casts them as agents that advance, however partially, the autonomy of the Mexican women. The authors do not incorporate moral qualifiers for this operation, maintaining a cautious neutrality that seeks to countervail racial antagonisms and abridge longstanding cross-border antipathies. Thus, in spite of its problematic logic of female
domesticity and public male visibility, heteronormative marriage in *Caballero* functions as a catalyst for the interstitial agency that the Mexican female characters enunciate.

While Warrener invokes a series of practical concessions in order to marry Susanita, “Red” McLane best embodies this ethos of entrepreneurialism and pragmatism. Captain Devlin describes McLane in chapter 7 as “a product of the frontier and in its fullest meaning” (*Caballero* 69), while Ike, McLane’s companion, offers a description that both parallels and rivals the text’s initial descriptions of Don Santiago (whom McLane ultimately supersedes):

“There was a sense of movement about him difficult to define—until, knowing him, one learned that it was Power. Power in the hard muscles under the long black coat and gray trousers which were tailored to a perfect fit, power in the swarthy face and flat mouth quirked up at the ends. And power in the small gray-blue eyes that saw far more than was laid out before them.” (68)

A politician and promoter with connections to prominent Anglo men, *71* Alfred “Red” McLane operates throughout the text as a figure who, alongside Robert Warrener, upends Mexican patriarchy by advancing the regions’ new economic order and through his eventual marriage to Don Santiago’s younger daughter, María de los Angeles (referred to as “Angela”).

Alert readers notice McLane’s capitalist initiatives as early as chapter 7. Here, the narrator describes McLane as “assembling his knowledge with a growing shrewdness” after Ursula Veramendi, the daughter of a Mexican governor who has recently married an Anglo man (the aforementioned James Bowie), explains “the graciousness of Mexican

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*71* The novel mentions Stephen Austin, James Bowie, and Sam Houston as examples of the men with whom McLane is in contact.
family life as it really was” (Caballero 70) to the other Anglo men present. The early emphasis on exogamy provides readers with a greater historical orientation regarding the region’s struggles, while also foregrounding a thematic base from which to construct these interactions in gendered and nationalist terms. Critic John Mack Faragher reminds readers that “[a]fter the conquest, when interethnic struggles over land and labor took center stage, the underlying agenda was to integrate these borderlands into the political economy of the capitalist state” (“Americans, Mexicans, Métis” 106). As the novel progresses, McLane’s actions increasingly reflect pragmatism in the domain of sexual politics. In fact, shortly after the descriptions of Doña Ursula, McLane admires her husband and hopes to imitate his success: “I am going to marry a woman like Doña Ursula,” McLane affirms, “one who has good looks and charm and is of a high-class family” (Caballero 70). Just as McLane qualifies his ability to achieve personal goals through exogamy, the narrator also casts this development as a harbinger for manly autonomy and the success that it entails: “He was no longer the boy, following. He was the man, the rudder of his ship in his own hands. Accompanying Houston to Nacogdoches, McLane acquired land and the Mexican law requiring that all landowners be baptized Catholic, he acquiesced without protest” (70). Described by the narrator as a “man of vision [who] saw that whoever controlled the Mexican vote would control politics for many, many years to come” (70), McLane reifies the pragmatic ethos of capitalist entrepreneurialism through a series of cultural concessions that establish him as

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72 The practices described here reflect the historical record. David Montejano writes, “American merchants and lawyers merely affixed themselves atop the Mexican hierarchy. In some cases, they intermarried and became an extension of the old elite. Intermarriage was a convenient way of containing the effects of Anglo military victory on their status, authority, and class position. For the ambitious Anglo merchant and soldier with little capital, it was an easy way of acquiring land. The social basis for postwar governance, in other words, rested on the class character of the Mexican settlements” (Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas 34).
a hegemonic figure, or as McLane himself explains, “‘You can squeeze something to your good out of everything that happens to you’” (70). 

In his article “Significant to Whom? Mexican Americans and the History of the American West,” historian David G. Gutiérrez remarks that “military conquest or absorption of one society by another usually represents only the first step of the process by which one society imposes itself on another” (520). The gradual accretion of the Anglo male characters’ claims to power corresponds to these claims. In fact, throughout the text, McLane’s rationale of profitable opportunism manifests itself alongside questions of language, geography, and religious identification, all while diminishing the authority of Mexican patriarchy. In chapter 7, for example, the narrator informs readers that in order to advance his political clout, McLane “would have learned to speak Spanish even if it had not been compulsory, and spent hour upon hour to perfect it both in speaking and in writing” (Caballero 70). Geography, too, plays a key role in this development, for in the same chapter readers learn that McLane, eager to establish himself in the recently annexed Texas, moved to San Antonio following the surrender of Mexican general Antonio López de Santa Anna, suspecting that the capital would be placed not far from the city. In questions of religion, McLane also provides pragmatic concessions, offering to convert to Catholicism even though his attitude toward religion

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73 Readers are reminded of this rationale much later in chapter 34, when the narrator reveals that McLane’s father “made poverty into a virtue,” while for McLane, poverty “had been a thing to hate and run from” (Caballero 316).

74 David Montejano observes that such cultural acclimation on the part of Anglos was not uncommon: “For the Anglo settlers, some degree of ‘Mexicanization’ was necessary for the most basic communication in this region, given the overwhelming number of Mexicans. But such acculturation meant far more than the learning of a language and a proper etiquette; it represented a way of acquiring influence and even a tenuous legitimacy in the annexed Mexican settlements. From participation in religious rituals and other communal activities to ‘becoming family’ through godparenthood or marriage—such a range of ties served to create an effective everyday authority, a type that Ranger or army guns alone could not secure” (Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas 37)
is itself far from devout. The narrator explains that “Red believed in prayer, but he did not ask a Supreme Being for anything which he himself could not accomplish” (119). Readers will recall that McLane’s emphasis on individual autonomy in religious matters contrasts markedly with the devotion of the Catholic Mexican patriarch, who claims in chapter 30, “‘It is not my will, señores, I recognized a Higher Force and bowed to it’” (281).

Perhaps more importantly, though, McLane constructs his masculine identity against the backdrop of territorial possession and the validity of war concessions, describing both in ways that configure Anglo men as agents of both conquest and clemency. In chapter 19, McLane repudiates the obstinacy and elitism of Don Santiago by foregrounding Mexico’s war concessions and the subsequent ascendency of American legal codes as precedents to which Santiago must comply:

‘I have authority from the governor, and I may say that I represent, in spirit at least, all of the thinking, the wiser, men of Texas. Putting it bluntly, you Mexicans are a conquered race, but what you are not as yet aware of is that the conquering boot of the Americano has no heel. We will take our families into the land of the Indian and fight him, we fight in battle, but we are soft nevertheless. As a nation we do not confiscate, do you understand? Even Texas, which is our by conquest, will be paid for in money. What I am trying to tell you, señor, is that you are no longer a colony of Mexico, and adjustment will have to be made to make you a part of the new Texas. I have come to offer you a pleasant, remunerative way to make that adjustment.’ (Caballero 180)
McLane’s approbation of territorial conquest by virtue of monetary exchange affirms the dual and contradictory roles of the Anglo male characters. Such ambivalence should not surprise readers, however, when one considers the unique positions that González herself occupied professionally. Open for debate is whether González, in conjunction with her Anglo co-author, crafted these representations as a sort of intervention for an Anglo audience familiar with the more celebratory, pro-Anglo accounts of Texas history, such as those of Walter Prescott Webb. Regardless, McLane elides the abuses of territorial expansion and the dubious morality of Anglo occupation by linking the virtue of Texas annexation to the territory’s status as an exchangeable commodity. Rather than offer moralizing homilies about the alleged superiority of Anglo culture, institutions, and racial purity, McLane instead emphasizes pragmatic concession and conquest-based consumerism. Still, this operation occludes the abuses that undercut such processes of “unequal exchange”, to use a Marxist term, at the hands of the novel’s Anglo men.

In fact, Captain Devlin’s descriptions of McLane in chapter 7 preface the ascendancy of McLane in the region at the same time that they foreground these same entrepreneurial qualities as foundational for the type of (Anglo) men who will retain power in the recently annexed Texas:

‘I consider Red a true Texan ... It is my belief that the country will develop a certain breed of men different from any other. Hard, in many cases ruthless, the men of that breed will have courage above the ordinary and the thing courage needs to bring it anywhere—vision ... He is about thirty-five or -six, and already wealthy, started most of the enterprises in the state and owns almost all of San

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75 Marxists have understood the concept of “unequal exchange” in various and complex ways. For more information, consult the economist Arghiri Emmanuel’s book chapter “The Theory of Imperialism and Unequal Exchange” in Marxist Thought on Imperialism: Survey and Critique.
Antonio. It took him a long time to gain the confidence of the Mexicans ... but he finally succeeded. He’s honest too.’ (Caballero 71)

As the text progresses, and as Mexican patriarchy continues to fragment, McLane invokes the physical border and the continued westward expansion of the United States as rationales aimed at prompting Santiago to relinquish—in the name of practicality—his stalwart opposition to the Anglos’ presence. Responding to Santiago’s claim that “[t]he Nueces River is the boundary and that leaves me in Mexico” (180), McLane informs him that Mexico is currently negotiating the price of Texas, California, and New Mexico, and that as such, Mexico herself “is selling all of you [border Mexicans] right along with it and without a tear. If you must be loyal, put your loyalty where it will do some good” (180). McLane’s insistence on practical concession overrides the complexities of this process for a people, like Santiago, who witness the erosion of their cultural stalwarts, the military defeat of their native country, and a mandatory acclimatization to a new social order that uproots traditional sexual politics.

McLane’s subsequent transition to the politics of the nuclear family transmutes the Anglo conquest from explicitly territorial terms to the domains of culture, marriage, and posterity. Explaining to Santiago that he has “everything to gain and nothing to lose,” McLane extols Anglo values while contrasting them with a series of abuses and pitfalls at the hands of Mexico and her leaders: “We like family and tradition also and cling to it. You know Mexico is rotten and is through with you” (Caballero 182). McLane incorporates the symbolic role of the family (so crucial to the hacienda order) as a mechanism that trivializes capitalist expansion and the territorial conquest it necessitates.
As the text draws toward its conclusion, readers encounter a revelation that would prove surprising when left unexamined alongside McLane’s other pragmatic decisions: unlike Warrener, McLane never held romantic feelings for his Mexican bride-to-be (Caballero 214). In fact, rather than correspond to any set of ideals, Angela serves merely as a conduit for McLane’s entrepreneurial ambitions, and a survey of their individual prerogatives showcases dramatic polarities between the two. Angela desires to become a nun, Warrener a successful politician. Even though their trajectories initially appear incompatible, readers notice that their relationship fosters important benefits for each. We learn that Angela’s religious piety and unassuming meekness complement her husband’s pragmatism by allowing both to pursue their individual interests without sexual obligations or the demands of child dependents.76 Along these lines, José E. Limón argues that McLane understands that “Mexicans must be included in the new ‘nation’” and that his marriage to Angela accomplishes just that (“Mexicans, Foundational Fictions” 351). Still, readers must also remain attentive to the fact that as a result of his marriage to Angela, McLane secures the future support of local Mexican-Americans (Caballero 214)—an achievement that strongly reflects his own philosophical platitude described later in chapter 25: “‘Know what you want, be sure you want it, figure whether its use to you was at least as equal to the wanting, then study about getting it, and get it’” (244). From his initial admiration of other Anglo men to his successful emulation of these same men through his own marriage, McLane performs his masculinity pragmatically and opportunistically, all to the detriment of Mexican patriarchy.

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76 Ike’s comments to McLane in chapter 22 echo a similar sentiment: “‘You want to marry a Mexican girl from the higher class because it’ll be to your advantage to get the Mexicans on your side. This girl has a vulnerable spot and you work on it. She believes she is converting you to her church and that’s a joke that isn’t funny, Red’” (Caballero 213).
The beginnings of the novel extol McLane in terms of his physical presence, and the concluding sections of the novel praise him in equally masculine terms by highlighting the efficiency of his entrepreneurialism and the potential benefits it holds for those, like the Mendozas, who have the opportunity to acclimate. In chapter 35, Gabriel del Lago foreshadows the eventual ascendancy of Anglo men by gauging the latter’s pragmatism as a characteristic that positions them as the future architects of Texas society:

‘I have concluded that unless we go to Mexico and stay completely Mexican we must conform in part. I have had Señor McLane record my land. It is men like him who will really build Texas, Santiago, though I fear many will be harder than he. He is amazing. Yes, I stayed in his house when I found that I—I loved Delores, and I marveled at the efficiency of it as compared to our own; and the manner in which he is directing Angela’s piety is surprising, you would not know her. If I have bent down from my pride, it is because I thought it wiser to have pride suffer a little rather than have all the rest of me suffer. ... My land, a wife, a good will with my neighbors, they are things to enjoy even if one gives some pride in exchange for them.’ (authors’ emphasis *Caballero* 327)

The progression of the novel showcases the increasing decadence of the Mexican males’ claims to power in social, economic, and spatial terms. Competing notions of masculinity underpin these contentious, at times violent, interactions, forcing all men, Mexican and Anglo alike, to grapple with the compulsions that safeguard their respective male codes. How each does so, however, holds important implications for the Mexican female characters.
VII. Mexican Women: Moral Paragons and Conduits of Masculinity Construction

VII.A. Introduction

In their article “Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History,” historians William Cronon and Jay Gitlin alongside curator George Miles observe the foundational role of gender codes in the construction and perpetuation of the United States’ western settlements: “the frontier goal of transmitting an older cultural world into a new one finally depended on the roles men and women played in the reproductive process itself, so that marriage, love, and family--however defined--lay at the very heart of the transition from frontier to region” (21). Commenting on the conciliatory subtext between Anglos and Mexicans in Caballero, José E. Limón echoes a similar sentiment but extends his claim specifically to the female characters: “Consolidation, the narrative suggests, is better carried out by coolheaded, intelligent, resourceful, socially compassionate, ‘unfeminine’ women” (“Mexicans, Foundational Fictions” 351). The novel thematizes the construction of competing masculine codes against the backdrop of territorial expansion in the recently annexed Texas, and readers quickly realize that these processes entail a series of changing roles for the novel’s women. As Monika Kaup has observed, the novel posits Mexican women in the United States as “the mothers of a new, amalgamated breed of Texans” while their marriages, in turn, “produce new family units and ethnically mixed genealogies” (“The Unsustainable Hacienda” 577). Still, scholars have not examined how the duties and roles of these same women change depending upon their symbolic status in the construction and performance of the novels competing masculine codes.
This section proposes that through their marriages to Anglo men, Mexican women operate as mothers of an inter-racial posterity ready to participate in the economy of white capitalist citizenship and its attendant privileges of national belonging and (Anglo) cultural legitimacy. Reminding readers that “U.S. citizenship in the nineteenth-century was predicated on whiteness,” Andrew Tinnemeyer argues that throughout Caballero, “marriage becomes an act of political whitening” (“Enlightenment and the Crisis of Whiteness” 22, 28). This chapter adds that the Anglo male characters function as catalysts of an imperialist project that simulates a narrative ambiguity: the novel lauds these interracial matrimonies as syncretic unions, but it also limits cultural exchange by privileging Anglo-pioneered capitalism and competitive male individualism. This study maintains that by foregrounding manhood and cultural intelligibility within the domain of an emergent South Texas capitalism, these male characters circumscribe Mexican-Anglo tensions in two ways: through the promise of productive heterosexual marriage (Warrener-Susanita) or through an ethos of pragmatic entrepreneurialism (McLane-Angela). Rather than represent with historical accuracy the racial and socio-economic conflicts of the text’s diegetic setting, the authors posit a syncretic, yet ultimately ambivalent, vision of a national community in the years immediately after the modern-day border “crossed over” the first Chicanos.

VII.B. Policing Female Honor: Compulsive Heterosexuality and Anglo Intervention

While this project has explored the notion of gender performativity and its relation to identity formation (see chapter 1), the compulsory nature of sexuality likewise

77 Sociologist Michael Schwalbe has taken note of the intersection between capitalism and masculinity construction, arguing that “the capitalist system is reproduced through the engendering of males as men” in that the “inculcation of desires to signify masculine selves” emerges from “this control imperative [and] exploitive economy” (Manhood Acts 102).
demands theoretical orientation for the present case study regarding the representation of
*Caballero*’s female characters. In her 1980 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and
Lesbian Existence,” poet and feminist scholar Adrienne Rich argues that gender binaries
and compulsory heterosexuality have largely operated as oppressive forces against
women, organizing and determining the parameters of licit sexuality and gender
performance through a heteronormative logic that is both economically and domestically
patriarchal. Understood as an obligatory and institutionalized practice, heterosexuality, in
Rich’s view, constructs gender codes that reflect male-female complementarity, with the
long-term effect of compounding women into subordinate social and domestic positions.
As a key pillar to social organization, heterosexuality, Rich argues, is natural only to the
extent that it has been institutionalized as such, while gender nonetheless demonstrates an
inherent porosity as a “continuum” rather than as a fixed social grid of male-female
compatibility (648-49). The foreword of the novel establishes a similar logic in its
initial treatment of gender performance and women. The narrator describes Susana, the
wife of the novel’s first Mexican patriarch, as one who fulfills the necessities of feminine
duty: “She had inculcated the doctrine of traditionalism in the children—religion,
gentility, family rank, patriarchalism—those were the good things, the only ones”
(*Caballero* 21). Having qualified Susana as a moral compass and domestic supervisor,
the text then represents her as a catalyst for the continuation of hacienda patriarchy. As
she lies on her deathbed, she compels her son Santiago, the Mendoza male heir, to “[b]e
worthy of Ranch La Palma De Cristo and the things for which it stands” (21), thus
foregrounding the aforementioned pillars of Mexican patriarchy (“religion, gentility,

78 Rich specifically uses the term “lesbian continuum” to describe this process.
[and] family rank”) as mechanisms that will structure the social life of the hacienda’s male and female actors.

As early as chapter 3, Santiago reprimands his sister Dolores, claiming that her defiance and insubordination led to her husband’s death, later demanding her unconditional obedience to her brother-patriarch (Caballero 25). Later, in chapter 4, the narrator reveals that before Anglo occupation, “it was not unusual to betroth a [Mexican] girl at thirteen, and girlhood leaped from tight bud to full flower without the slow, sweet unfolding of the petals” (41). By chapter 16, McLane, speaking to Warrener with regards to Don Santiago, laments the difficulty of realizing his goals because of the patriarch’s stalwart opposition to Anglos and claiming, “‘The girls are so trained to obedience and forms of behavior’” (147). Throughout the novel, Mexican men police the sexual license and social activities of their female counterparts in the name of honor. The narrator confirms as much in chapter 30, decrying the sexist workings of the practice in the following terms:

Ironically, the Mexican caballero gave stern codes of honor to his women—waiting but the chance to dishonor them. He made an inflexible law of chaperonage, to protect them from himself. No woman exposed herself alone to the public, that was the law, and when she did expose herself she announced to the world that she belonged to men ... Honor! It was a fetishism. It was a weapon in the hand of the master, to keep his woman enslaved, and his fingers had twisted upon it so tightly he could not let go. (280)

This practice both allows them to retain positions of power as actors of, and heirs to, hacienda patriarchy. While the Mexican female characters’ marriages to Anglo men
entail a separate series of obstacles, these same unions are able to destabilize Mexican patriarchy. The evolution of Susanita reflects these processes accordingly.

VII.C. Susanita: Meekness and Piety as Conduits for Anglo Masculinity Construction

Much to their surprise, the text’s Mexican characters find themselves United States citizens in response to Mexico’s territorial concessions following the Mexican-American War. These juridical provisions entail a series of changes that alter dominant gender codes to the detriment of the Mexican men. The Mexican women, meanwhile, both benefit from and suffer under these new imperatives of U.S. citizenship. How? In her co-authored study with postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak entitled *Who Sings the Nation State?: Language, Politics, Belonging*, Judith Butler claims that the nation-state operates as “the matrix for the obligations and prerogatives of citizenship” (3), in large part through the actions of its juridical and military apparatuses. Even so, because of the political machinations subtending these same juridical and military institutions, the nation-state may also transgress the securities and entitlement of citizenship for marginal groups (4). Of Texas history and the Mexicans who became U.S. citizens with the signing of Guadalupe Hidalgo, these observations prove especially relevant. As José E. Limón explains, “the Texas Revolution and the War with Mexico laid the foundation for racializing Mexicans as nonwhites [just as] white owners of cotton farms began to experiment with Mexican labor” (*American Encounters* 13).79 In *Caballero*, as we have seen, the Mexican male characters fail to adapt to the treaty’s juridical measures and violently resist Anglo military presence through guerrilla warfare. The same cannot be

79 Limón adds that when the Republic of Texas protected slavery in section 9 of its constitution, “Texas whites had won in their revolt against Mexico what whites in the U.S. South would lose a few decades later with the outbreak of the Civil War, when slaves constituted approximately 30 percent of the population and when more than one-fourth of all Texas families owned slaves” (*American Encounters* 19).
said of the female characters. The novel’s representation of Susanita demonstrates just that.

Early in the novel, the narrator casts the subordination of Susanita as key for the maintenance of Mexican patriarchy. Affirming that Santiago seeks to keep Susanita in a child-like state of consciousness (Caballero 29), the narrator later adds, “It was not ladylike to express her wishes, and papá might start preaching about respect and duty” (38). Readers notice that the text qualifies the censorship of Susanita’s protests along the lines of gender normativity (the compulsion to remain “ladylike”) and family honor (the need to uphold “respect and duty”). By doing so, the Caballero calls attention to how tradition and family namesake establish a trajectory of Mexican male privilege. Whereas her paternal grandmother, Susana, understood these traditional strictures (“the good things, the only things”) as vital for the continuity of social life, Susanita works to sabotage these domestic strictures altogether, even though her name (a derivative of Susana) would suggest otherwise. Only through her interactions with Warrener, however, is she able to do so.80

The novel’s careful treatment of Warrener’s arrival (both in terms of the emotional reaction it elicits from Susanita and the physical space in which it occurs) foreshadows the emancipatory potential of their courtship. Only twenty-three pages after seeing Warrener (the first Anglo she has ever seen), Susanita affirms her love for the stranger (Caballero 84). That the scene occurs in a church, and shortly after a wedding, only qualifies the meeting as a harbinger for the uprooting of Mexican patriarchy. In fact, shortly after her confession to Warrener, the narrator represents her romantic feelings

80 Susanita’s paternal great-grandmother is first referred to in the foreword as “Susanita Ulloa” and is only thereafter referred to as “Susana” (xxxvii - xxxix).
toward the Anglo as a type of expedient to the novel’s treatment of cultural hybridity:

“Susanita slept on a cloud, if it could be said she slept at all. Susanita forgot her resolve made that afternoon, to stay with her own people in everything” (84). In his essay “Culture’s In-Between,” Homi K. Bhabha affirms that “[s]trategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the ‘authoritative’, even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign” (58). By consciously disavowing her father’s patriarchalism (Bhabha’s “cultural sign[s]”), Susanita fosters what Bhabha would term “the emergence of an ‘interstitial’ agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism” (58). As the novel progresses, readers grow increasingly aware of such processes of defiance and enunciation.

In chapter 9, Susanita dresses for a pre-Christmas dance and is described by the narrator as “the queen of beauty, in a perfection of green and gold and cream” (Caballero 88). Yet, in spite of such acclaim, Susanita resists the expectations to which she must conform, claiming that she doesn’t feel authentic and that she harbors resentment towards herself as a result of such frustration (88). Her aunt Dolores scolds her, reminding her that such public performances of beauty and pedigree are essential for embracing womanhood: “Susanita, you are frightened that you are a woman. Come, your father is waiting” (88). Perhaps in response to these conflicting phenomena, Susanita experiences ambivalence as she grapples with the compulsion to satisfy her romantic attraction at the expense of her family’s honor, as when the narrator reveals her thought process: “So now, she thought, I am a traitor. Yet I love an Americano, yet I am glad” (114). This ambivalence forces a reckoning of consciousness for Susanita at the same time that it
signals a decisive break in the text’s treatment of gender normativity and the Mexican patriarchy in which such expectations take root.

We have previously addressed the scene in which Susanita attempts to save her brother Alvaro from execution at the hands of Anglos, and how her visibility in a public, male-dominated space provokes swift condemnation. Susanita’s alleged transgression of family honor, however, merits extended discussion, as it affirms both the policing of female bodies as a masculine practice and the necessity of censure as a guarantor of tradition. Shortly after failing to rescue her brother, Susanita meets a series of admonitions rooted in the sanctity of an honor that she has since compromised. Santiago, for one, reprimands her accordingly: “‘Your honor, Susanita, was also mine, and that of the man to whom you were promised. You took what was not only yours and mine, but his also’” (Caballero 280). The patriarch’s reprimand demonstrates both the compulsory obedience to a male-supervised code of honor, as well as how, to quote Marci R. McMahon, “constructions of Spanish identity and manhood occur through the propertied female body” (“Politicizing Spanish-American Domesticity” 242). The critique goes further still, positing female honor as a mechanism that forces women to function as passive conduits to masculinity construction. Consider, for example, the comments of Santiago in chapter 30:

‘A true lady, Susanita, knows that her honor must be kept unsoiled above all else, because it belongs also to her family, is part of a proud name and the first obligation to the master of the house. Death is nothing ... if she but save her honor. Alvaro’s death ... would have been a glory to our name as against the shame you have put upon it by dragging it in the dust.’ (279)
Marci R. McMahon argues that this code of honor “configures women as objects of ‘Spanish’ property [that] lead men to use the female body as a site of resistance to Anglo-American settlers” (“Politicizing Spanish-American Domesticity” 241). Much like the Mexican female gender code that Susanita ultimately defies, the legitimacy of this male-supervised code of honor stems from the repetition of, and loyalty to, antecedent qualifiers: domesticity, forced consent, limited visibility, and a commodified personhood to be bartered through arranged marriages. As Susanita protests in chapter 30, “‘It is hard, to be watched and watched every minute and never have anything to say about what one likes or wants. It looks right to you, but it is not always right’” (Caballero 283). Readers should also understand how Santiago’s comments qualify female honor as a communal investment (“it belongs also to her family”) and as linchpins to the patriarch’s masculine performance (her honor is “the first obligation to the master of the house”). The caricature of women in such terms, we realize, reinforces their roles as conduits for the maintenance of an imagined Mendoza community. Occupying shifting roles as abjected figures, moral paragons, and sexualized icons, the Mexican women complement the claims to power of the Mexican men through subordinated roles in a stratified, non-egalitarian sexual politics.

Consider, again, the marked contrasts between the actions of Susanita and the provisions espoused by her paternal grandmother, Susana, the feminine moral paragon described earlier in the novel’s prequel. The narrator writes, “Religion, traditions, the ways that had survived centuries and received permanence through that survival, gentility—all those Susan inculcated in her grandchildren. If she was stern almost to harshness, it was because only duty upheld her” (Caballero xxxix). Susanita, however,
ultimately offsets the permanence of these strictures through the enunciation of an “‘interstitial’ agency” to again use Bhabha’s term (“Culture’s In-Between” 58). In doing so, she compromises the Mendoza family’s understanding of gender as a permanent fixture, as well as the notion of Spanish-Mexican culture as preeminently superior and non-negotiable.

Readers witness the dissolution of these gendered strictures and the enunciation of Susanita’s “‘interstitial’ agency” when she and Warrener wed. In a scene that reflects the deeply rooted nature of hacienda traditions, readers learn that Susanita must wear the wedding dress of her mother and that, in preparation for the wedding, both women “went over the list of things required of the daughter of a don, a ruling rigid as law” (Caballero 255). After the ceremony takes place some five chapters later, though, readers witness Susanita relinquish these patriarchal bonds by embracing a life that she has, at least in part, chosen of her own volition: “She knew now that she could, and would, keep her face turned forward toward the future, without lingering glances for what was past and gone” (293). González and Raleigh do not endorse marriage as a simple panacea for the gamut of gendered inequalities that the female characters confront. They do, however, configure it as an imperfect medium, far from ideal, but a pragmatic maneuver that is nonetheless conducive to a sought-after social mobility in an increasingly capitalist borderlands.

How the authors configure Susanita’s marriage likewise gives rise to a narrative tension. Soon, Susanita’s role as conduit to Warrener’s masculine performance and as a catalyst for his claims to power ultimately truncate her own claims to autonomy. Pablo

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81 The symbolic role of Padre Pierre is also worth mention. A Mexican national with ancestral ties to the French occupation of Mexico, Pierre willingly marries Warrener and Susanita, claiming that the Anglos are indeed the “‘more virile race’” (Caballero 158) and serving as a symbolic catalyst for the erosion of hacienda-based Mexican patriarchy.
Ramírez explains that the advantages of hybridity afford a certain level of autonomy since hybridity, throughout González’s work, “expands the category of whiteness and in doing so extends the full privileges of citizenship to Mexican-Americans” (“Resignifying Preservation” 34). This study adds, however, that these claims to agency only reach partial fulfillment. Carlos Gallego explains the problematic emergence of Mexican-American subjectivity by highlighting how these claims to identity emerge only partially, in ways that reflect the superordinancy of dominant cultural narratives:

Difference is only acceptable if it fits within the parameters of a given situation, like that of the capitalist, parliamentary-democratic society protected by the government of the United States. Within this situation, the aforementioned marginalized identities at some point become recognizable, but only if and when they exist within the defined parameters of the state. This strategy, of course, only functions to modify a situation, leaving the networks of power intact. (Chicana/o Subjectivity and the Politics of Identity 99)

In chapter 25, Warrener promises that he himself will teach her English so that he can show her off to his family (Caballero 241). In the end, Susanita shifts from one male dominated sphere to another, transmuting her role from would-be moral paragon to acculturated icon. What’s more, her status as a conduit to her Anglo husband’s success gives further primacy to white capitalist citizenship. This transformation is equally evident in the case of Angela.

82 Arnoldo De León maintains that “male observers of Tejano society usually made fewer critical comments about Mexican women than Mexican men [since] Mexican women were said to possess numerous redeeming traits: charm, courtesy, kindness, generosity, and warm-heartedness. Additionally, there was something inviting and seductive about them” (They Called Them Greasers 39-40). De León adds, “There exists at least some indication that Mexican women could be accepted by whites in Texas under certain circumstances--but only if they could approximate the ideal of white beauty” (40).
VII.D. María de los Angeles: Complementing Masculine Entrepreneurialism through Meekness and Piety

This study has previously examined the pragmatism that informs the masculine code of “Red” McLane—the capitalist entrepreneur who increases his authority in the Lower Rio Grande Valley by observing and imitating other successful Anglo men, often through negotiations or cultural concessions with borderland Mexicans. The Mendoza family is a case in point, and in particular McLane’s treatment of María de los Angeles. Much like the case of Susanita, the novel represents Angela as a woman who is only able to increase her autonomy through a problematic operation—that is, through her marriage to an Anglo man and by fulfilling the latter’s expectations of noble lineage and whiteness. Neil Foley explains the racialized nineteenth century politics of Mexican-Anglo marriages by highlighting how the process favored Mexican women while disenfranchising their Mexican male counterparts:

> With few exceptions Anglo-Texan constructions of whiteness rarely included people of Mexican descent, and then only when they occupied important social and economic positions. When Anglo Texans married Mexicans, they often juggled the nomenclature to whiten their spouses by calling them Spanish Americans or simply Spanish. Mexican men, however, were only rarely accorded status as white persons, such as when they were owners of large ranches with marriageable daughters ... in Texas, unlike antebellum Georgia, Mexicans were still ‘Mexicans.’ (White Scourge 24)

Throughout *Caballero*, the Mexican men suffer increasing marginalization as a new socio-economic order and its racial paradigm (capitalist / Anglo-Saxon ‘white’) comes to supersede their own (semi-feudal / Spanish-Mexican ‘white’). The Mexican women
precipitate the decadence of this patriarchal hacienda order at the same time that they help advance the ascendance of their Anglo husbands as new hegemonic leaders in the recently conquered valley.

In chapter 4, Santiago takes pride in Angela’s meekness, relating her virtues to those of his great-grandmother and affirming the necessity to have these same characteristics publically validated: “‘You have the grace and gentility of my grandmother even more than Susanita has, and I wish it to be noticed’” (Caballero 37). Here, the text configures Angela as a type of pawn whose paternally policed visibility corroborates her father’s esteem and authority. While the Anglo and Mexican men differ substantially in the performances of their respective masculinities, they both commodify women’s bodies in ways that advance their own social clout. In chapter 7, McLane discusses the necessity of finding a Mexican wife, adding, “‘She has to be more than just the daughter of an hidalgo. She must have good looks and something—I’ll know it when I see it, though I can’t describe it’” (73). Neither the narrator nor any individual character reveals this ineffable quality. Despite this omission, readers learn that the sought-after attribute (very likely Angela’s religious piety) satisfies dominant ideas of race and class.

The eldest daughter and most religiously inclined child of Don Santiago, Angela grapples with a number of conflicting compulsions. In chapter 17, she confesses to Mother Gertrudis that despite her father’s arrangement to have her married to José Luis Carbajal, she desires something beyond the role of “‘be[ing] just the woman of the house’” (Caballero 154). Conscious of the limited options facing Mexican women, Mother Gertrudis urges caution, stating that Angela’s defiance would not “‘find popularity where wife and motherhood of itself is considered complete’” (154). Still,
despite these obstacles, Angela ultimately finds the solution to her dilemma through marriage to McLane. As we have noted previously, this agreement allows both to pursue their individual interests (McLane his entrepreneurialism, Angela her religious piety) without either suffering social stigmas.

VIII. Conclusion: Hybridity and Its Discontents

The contention of this chapter has been that the Anglo male characters operate throughout Caballero in dual and contradictory roles as both imperialists and emancipators in ways that reflect a gendered logic of masculine entrepreneurialism and territorial expansion. Just as the text often represents its male characters in ambivalent terms, so too does its treatment of Mexican women acknowledge the tensions underlying their unions to these same Anglo men. Vincent Pérez affirms that in spite of the novel’s moralizing assimilationist message reflected in the actions of McLane, the text itself “does not renounce all aspects of traditional Mexican culture, just as it resists a blanket valorization of Red’s modern capitalist perspective” (Remembering the Hacienda 111). I have argued that such a resistance situates itself in terms of gender performance and how the females’ claims to agency both increase as a result of their marriages and are yet circumscribed by this same process.

If the novel does in fact celebrate an idealized Mexican-Anglo syncretism along the borderlands, it does so through a series of ambivalent provisions. The female Mexican characters increase their autonomy, but they can do so only through marriages that treat them as public icons and as conduits for their Anglo husbands’ success. The Anglo men demonstrate a willingness to adopt elements of Mexican culture (language, religion), but, as “‘the more virile race’” (Caballero 158), they ultimately affirm the
superiority of their juridical and military institutions in the domains of citizenship and territorial governance. Written little more than a decade after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, *Caballero* was never published during González’s lifetime—a measure that historian José E. Limón attributes to her husband’s role in censuring the text altogether (“Introduction” xxi). It is ironic, though not terribly surprising, that the text’s female characters advance their autonomy through the interstices of dominant cultural and gender scripts, in ways that strongly parallel González’s own professional and domestic limitations. This section previously called attention the ambivalent provisions that the novel invokes in order to achieve its idealized syncretism. One more deserves mention: inasmuch as Don Santiago stresses the importance of Mexican patriarchy, it is only in death that the patriarch finally achieves happiness by escaping his many masculine anxieties. In the concluding sections, the narrator writes:

> It was a last irony that an American, and the man who took his most beloved child, should be the one to close the lids over the eyes of Don Santiago de Mendoza y Soria. Dying in the aloneness he had made, he lay on his back, arms outstretched, where Death had gently eased him from where he had been standing on the edge of the bluff. A smile lifted the lips set so long in bitterness, and peace smoothed the stern lines of the aristocratic face. (336)

The death of Don Santiago symbolizes the erasure of Mexican patriarchy and its attendant emphasis on cultural purism in the borderlands. By understanding the roles of

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83 Limón writes that in an interview the couple granted to historian María Cotera in the mid-1970s, Edmundo Mireles (husband of Jovita González) spoke for his wife, affirming that the novel (*Caballero*) had been destroyed, and that even if it existed, he “feared for its reception in the Chicano literary nationalist ambience of the period” (Limón “Introduction” xxi).

84 Renato Rosaldo has taken note of how the border’s demarcation altered sexual politics, affirming that “a border was imposed and the patriarchs were deposed” (“Politics, Patriarchs, and Laughter” 71)
the Anglo male characters discussed here as contradictory actors (both emancipators and imperialists), readers understand that the conclusion of the novel fails to conduce a resolution as concise as its “foundational” marriages might suggest. Though the principal patriarchal figures no longer hold hegemonic positions of power, the borderlands nonetheless evidence asymmetrical relations of power by privileging Anglo-led capitalism as a force that promotes an idealized hybrid American society. By doing so, the text problematically advances whiteness as a political category consonant with legitimate citizenship, yet it does so by simultaneously positioning its female characters as more autonomous social actors.

Written during a period of heightened racial tensions and border turmoil, Caballero functions as an ambiguous intervention, problematizing facile representations of Mexicans as an oppressed demographic bereft of agency, and of Anglo men as calloused colonizers immune to the concerns of their Mexican counterparts. Even so, the text configures the latter as nation-building and defending agents, complicit with a nascent capitalism in spite of their infrequent willingness to negotiate cultural strongholds. As past critics have commented, the text attempts to resolve these tensions through foundational marriages between Mexican women and Anglo men; however, by doing so, it lauds whiteness as a political category, leaving intact ambiguous tensions that do little to abate the politics and privileges of Anglo superiority. The agency that González and Raleigh afford to their female characters increases throughout the text, but it does so only within the confines of a heteronormative script of domesticity and capitalist entrepreneurialism. By configuring female agency as interstitial and partial, González and Raleigh interrogate gender normativity and masculinized nationalisms on
both sides of the border, but they do so cautiously. In fact, rather than displace the
primacy of whiteness or American nationalism, the authors invoke both, without
necessarily endorsing either, as structural staples to advance a feminist borderlands
critique. Whiteness here is no longer a pedigree reserved for Anglo male characters.
Rather, the identity marker operates centrifugally, extending to Mexican women provided
that they themselves complement a notion of citizenship that is “white” and “capitalist”.
By configuring nationalism and gender accordingly, the authors attempt to neutralize,
however partially, the racialized antagonisms of their own historical backdrop.
Chapter Three: “Like Communicants”: Mimetic Desire, Abjection, and Anglo Hegemonic Masculinities in Blood Meridian (1985) by Cormac McCarthy

“Like the Sabine virgins, she [Mexico] will soon learn to love her ravisher.”\textsuperscript{85}  -The New York Herald (1847)

I. Introduction

One year before the publication of Blood Meridian (1985), then U.S. President Ronald Reagan spoke during a press conference at the London Economic Summit on June 14, 1984, regarding the imperative to monitor and control the borders of the United States: “But the simple truth,” President Reagan affirmed, “is that we’ve lost control of our own borders, and no nation can do that and survive”.\textsuperscript{86} A thinly veiled reference to the United States’ southern border with Mexico, the President’s statement echoed national preoccupations with a growing drug cartel epidemic and the ensuing efforts to more effectively police the border--processes that largely ignored, according to David Lorey, the United States’ complicity in the illegal drug market.\textsuperscript{87} Fitting for a president whose cowboy persona arguably rivaled even that of Theodore Roosevelt before him, President Reagan’s comments, made against the backdrop of the Cold War, thematized a call to national defense that fettered questions of nation-state demarcation to nation-state survival.\textsuperscript{88} One year later, Cormac McCarthy published Blood Meridian, or the Evening

\textsuperscript{85} Quote obtained from Amy S. Greenburg’s book Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire (22).
\textsuperscript{86} Quote obtained from the book chapter “Mexicans of Mass Destruction” by Leo R. Chavez (92).
\textsuperscript{87} In his book The U.S.-Mexican Border in the Twentieth Century, David Lorey affirms, “In the 1980s drug trafficking reemerged as a pressing issue in border life, broadly affecting U.S.-Mexican relations as well as the regional economy and society. The United States blamed Mexico for its role as the source of the illegal drugs and for its failure to prevent the drugs from being trans-shipped through the border region of the United States ... Mexico countered such charges by arguing that its extensive drug interdiction programs could not change the fact that the U.S. market represented the principal stimulant to drug trafficking. U.S. consumers continued to spend in excess of 50 billion dollars per year on illegal drugs. Thirty-four percent of the total population aged twelve and older in the United States had used illegal drugs” (161).
\textsuperscript{88} Historian Patricia Nelson Limerick takes note of President Reagan’s symbolic recourse to border imagery, writing that “[w]hen politicians in the 1980s bemoaned the fact that America had ‘lost control’ of its border with Mexico, they dreamed up a lost age of mastery. In fact ... the Mexican border was a social
*Redness in the West*, an historical novel that narrativizes the violent exploits of the westward-moving Glanton scalp hunting expedition along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Written during the Cold War and at a time of increasing border militarization and U.S.-bound Mexican immigration, *Blood Meridian* explores the relationship between violence, masculinity construction, and empire, and it forces its readers to contemplate a number of complex questions regarding what borders exist and must be observed (or crossed) in the domain of masculinity construction and—most importantly—at whose expense. Somewhere between Texas and Mexico, English and Spanish, “us” and “them,” the novel’s child protagonist, the kid, becomes a man, yet he can do so only by virtue of the compulsion to emulate three Anglo masculine models: the nationalist Captain White, the scalp-hunting gang leader John Joel Glanton, and the mysterious Judge Holden.

McCarthy’s fifth novel, *Blood Meridian* traces the trajectory of its young protagonist as he runs away from home and his negligent father, moves west, and ultimately participates as a member of the historical Glanton scalp hunting expedition along, and in the areas surrounding, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As the novel progresses, the kid is forced to grapple with the violence that informs the masculine scripts of his three hegemonic Anglo leaders in a region bereft of any moral order. His eventual repudiation of genocidal violence configures him as an apostate to the agreed-upon male code, or what the ex-priest in the novel terms “the new faith” (*Blood*... fiction that neither nature nor people in search of opportunity observed” (*Legacy of Conquest* 251). Historian Richard Slotkin echoes a similar sentiment, affirming that the constellation of frontier imagery, border anxieties, and national security throughout the 1980s underpinned the trajectory of the administration in question: “the rhetoric and ideology of the Reagan administration was not only drenched with frontier imagery, but was ... structured and directed in its policies by that ideology” (*Fatal Environment* xvii).
The kid’s death at the hands of his third, and most malevolent, male model, Judge Holden, assures readers that the region’s deeply rooted male code and its concomitant forms of violence preclude any deviation from this new masculine norm.

As we have seen, Jovita González and Eve Raleigh’s border romance *Caballero* establishes a narrative ambiguity with regards to masculinity construction and performance: at the same time that the novel deconstructs the primacy of Mexican patriarchy and the organizing power of the hacienda, the text simultaneously casts its Anglo male characters as both emancipatory agents and imperialistic actors, all while affording the female characters greater agency within the confines of “white” capitalist citizenship. Just as *Caballero* responds to distinct historical junctures regarding immigration and border violence, so too does *Blood Meridian* in unique ways. While critics such as Timothy Parrish, Dana Phillips, and Steven Frye have expounded upon the pervasiveness of physical violence in *Blood Meridian*, this chapter argues that the novel’s representation of violence encompasses both physical and epistemic manifestations, and that both emerge from mimetic desire and performative compulsion under the guise of three hegemonic Anglo male archetypes. An examination of the text accordingly illustrates the perpetuation of hegemonic masculine codes that depend as much upon an empiricist rationale of racial and gender superiority as they do upon the violent atrocities that they demand and (falsely) justify. Operating along the axes of race and gender, physical and epistemic violence in *Blood Meridian* substantiates behaviors and outlooks

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89 Frye links the novel’s violence to Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, noting what he calls humans’ “impulse to violence” (“Poetics of Violence” 116). In contrast, Phillips claims that McCarthy’s use of violence “is not a sign or symbol of something else” (“History and the Ugly Facts of Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*” 435). In his book chapter “Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*: The First and Last Book of America”, Parrish, differing from both, identifies what Girard calls a “will to violence” (80), yet his discussion neglects mimetic theory’s deeper insights into the generative nature of violence, as well as the homosocial bonds that emerge as a result of this violence.
that are considered “andro-normative,” thereby reflecting the observation of R.W.
Connell that for men, it is “[t]he process of constructing masculinity [that] is often the
source of violence” (The Men and the Boys 218). By exposing the mimetic and
homosocial mechanisms that undergird such processes of masculinity construction, Blood
Meridian interrogates the alleged superiority of the Anglo male in the U.S.-Mexico
borderlands during the mid to late 1800s by exposing the compulsions to violent male
performances that the text’s hegemonic figures demand at the expense of women,
Mexicans, and Native Americans.

II. Theoretical Framework and Argument

This particular case study incorporates theoretical frameworks developed by
philosopher and anthropologist René Girard, as well as those of gender theorists Judith
Butler and Julia Kristeva, in order to examine how physical and epistemic violence
operate productively for the Anglo male characters under the guise of three hegemonic
male models. If “[v]iolent men can be viewed as over-conformists,” as scholar James
Beynon has argued (Masculinities and Culture 82), and if “[t]he practices that shape and
realize desire are ... an aspect of the gender order,” as Connell has suggested
(Masculinities 74), careful readers of Blood Meridian are forced to consider the complex
mechanisms that compel the Anglo men here to extol, idealize, and imitate violent

90 My use of the term “andro-normative” refers to prototypically masculine performances in the novel and expounds upon what Shaw terms the “andro-centric code of the West.” For further reading, consult Shaw’s article “The Kid’s Fate, the Judge’s Guilt”.
91 As a novel based largely on historical events and figures, the processes of masculinity construction in Blood Meridian testify to the comments of historian Amy S. Greenburg: “[A]gressive expansionism, defined here as support for the use of war to gain new American territory, between the U.S.-Mexico War, through the filibustering of the 1850s, and up through the Civil War, was supported by martial men, and that debates over Manifest Destiny also were debates over the meaning of American manhood and womanhood” (Manifest Manhood 14).
92 In this regard, I concur with Robert L. Jarrett who, in his book examining the thematic evolution of McCarthy’s novels, stresses that violence in Blood Meridian does not “function for its own sake” and that instead “McCarthy’s novel dramatizes the theme of conquest primarily through its unrelenting violence” (Cormac McCarthy 87, 90).
behaviors at the expense of their colored borderland counterparts. In order to approach these questions, I will briefly outline the theoretical principles upon which this particular case study relies.

René Girard maintains that all human relationships and desires operate mimetically, and that the purported identity of a subject emerges and is sustained by virtue of a simulated relationship that he or she maintains with a specific model who endorses a particular object or mode of behavior (Deceit, Desire, and the Novel 2-11). The organizing forces of a particular culture condition these processes through prohibitions and hierarchies, and the real or perceived loss of these same cultural frameworks likewise structure social organization by compelling individuals to provisionally resolve crises through the scapegoating of marginalized individuals. Viewed accordingly, physical violence operates cathartically, through the expulsion or slaying of marginal individuals, as well as productively, as a resource that allows individuals to identify themselves within larger configurations of culture and belonging (The One By Whom Scandal Comes 31). The masculine archetypes studied here each employ diverse forms of violence as reflections of a particular male script, in ways that configure the male characters as defenders or builders of a national community through

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93 Corroborating the insights of the scholars and theorists discussed in chapter one regarding mimesis, performativity, and homosociality, Girard himself argues that “the fundamental paradox of human desire” is the fact “that the more morbidly self-centered an individual becomes, the more morbidly other-centered he also becomes” (“Narcissism” 187). Eve Sedgwick notably makes use of Girard’s triangular framework in her study entitled Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire. Despite her high regard for Girard’s theory, Sedgwick claims that Girard’s model is not sufficiently nuanced to account for how a change in gender would subsequently affect a rivalry. For more information, consult chapter one of the aforementioned study.

94 Girard defines scapegoats as “exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants. Their status as foreigners or enemies, their servile condition, or simply their age prevents these future victims from fully integrating themselves into the community” (Violence and the Sacred 12).
the scapegoating of colored borderland dwellers. In order to substantiate their violent directives and rationales of authority, though, these male leaders also rely on discourses of abjection.

Linguistic and philosopher Julia Kristeva has commented extensively on such phenomena. In her study entitled *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva maintains that abjection allows individuals to construct and maintain identities through the repeated rejection or denigration of “othered” individuals who counter conventional truths concerning a dominant culture or sense of belonging. Interestingly, Kristeva has incorporated the metaphor of “border” to delineate how abjection fortifies claims to identity among competing groups of individuals: “How can I be without a border?” she asks, if only to later argue that abject(ed) peoples, precisely because they contest dominant cultural narratives, do not “respect [such] borders, positions, [and] rules.” As this study will demonstrate, these processes of rejection and repudiation throughout *Blood Meridian* fortify the boundaries of masculinity construction, individual and collective, for the Anglo male characters against, and at the expense of, their borderland counterparts of color. Judith Butler, for one, has argued that such operations of exclusion and abjection inform gender performances and their corresponding claims to identity. Of

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95 In his book chapter “From Beowulf to *Blood Meridian*: Cormac McCarthy’s Demystification of the Martial Code,” Rick Wallach also discusses the role of violence in a Girardian framework but elides the homosocial underpinnings of the male characters’ actions under the command of their military superiors.

96 The abject is, to use Kristeva’s own words, “beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” (1), and as something that “cannot be assimilated” (1), the abject thus “disturbs identity, system, [and] order” (2).

97 Sociologist Víctor Zúñiga also observes the power of borders in the construction of individual and collective subjectivities, arguing that they promote “affective, symbolic, and inter-subjective recognition among human beings” (“Nations and Borders” 43).

98 Specifically, Butler contends, “This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet ‘subjects,’ but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the
the Texas-Mexico borderlands in *Blood Meridian* these observations prove particularly relevant. The novel’s representation of physical and epistemic violence reinforces a logic of racial, gender, and national superiority among the Anglo male characters, who draw recourse to these forms of violence in order to successfully execute approved gender performances in their roles as nation-building and defending agents.

In one of the first critical studies of McCarthy’s novels, scholar Vereen M. Bell correctly observes in his book *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy* that “[s]urvival as a challenge to manhood is partly what *Blood Meridian* is about” (118). Susan Kollin, on the other hand, posits questions of imperialism and the subsequent construction of a national identity at the heart of the text’s thematic preoccupation, linking the novel’s Western genre with “its obsession with Anglo-American masculinity” (“Genre and the Geographies of Violence” 569). Still, readers should question what processes of masculinity construction coalesce with the imperatives to survival represented throughout the text. Equally pressing is the question of how, against the backdrop of war and territorial expansion, these violent prerogatives reflect and further entrench an imagined, homosocial fraternity of Anglo men? In response to these questions, this case study examines three Anglo masculine archetypes in conjunction with the downfall of the novel’s young male protagonist. Each of these male leaders condones and encodes

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status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (*Bodies* 3).

99 In his study *Gunfighter Nation*, Richard Slotkin outlines the changing conception of the frontier myth in the following terms: “In each stage of development, the Myth of the Frontier relates the achievement of the ‘progress’ to a particular form or scenario of violent action. ‘Progress’ itself was defined in different ways: the Puritan colonists emphasized the achievement of spiritual regeneration through frontier adventure; Jeffersonians (and later, the disciplines of Turner’s ‘Frontier Thesis’) saw the frontier settlement as a re-enactment and democratic renewal of the original ‘social contract’; while Jacksonian Americans saw the conquest of the Frontier as a means to the regeneration of personal fortunes and/or of patriotic vigor and virtue. But in each case, the Myth represented the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieve by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or ‘natural’ state, and *regeneration through violence*” (author’s emphasis 11-2).
violent masculine performances against the backdrop of continental expansion and Anglo racial and epistemic superiority. In turn, each also safeguards a trajectory of male development for the kid by sanctioning particular forms of violence that ensure male camaraderie, normalize racialized aggression, and advance claims to personal or collective identity. In its representation of these three particular archetypes, *Blood Meridian* thematizes an evolution in the deployment of male-enacted violence in the borderlands by gauging the kid’s affirmation, resistance, or transgression of the gender prerogatives specific to each particular male script.

Captain White’s invocation of nationalism and damning anti-Mexican stereotypes create a discursive space that fosters aggressive masculine performances requiring a common enemy in order to ensure camaraderie among White’s allegiants. By virtue of their shared antagonisms, his followers identity themselves individually as “men” and collectively as “American” as they combat the allegedly retrograde Southwestern Mexicans. These undertakings, in turn, compel the kid to begin the construction of his own masculine persona as a builder and defender of this national Anglo male community. Later, however, under the direction of John Joel Glanton, physical violence acquires an economic motive as the men participate in the text’s scalp-hunting expedition. While they are funded by both Mexican and U.S. agencies to kill and scalp Native Americans, Glanton’s men soon realize that the racial miscegenation of all non-Anglo borderland dwellers works to their favor--that is, they are able to kill individuals of color intermittently and without rebuke, with the promise of personal monetary gain absolving any moral codes that might otherwise preclude these endeavors. If the actions of White normalize the use of physical violence through the ploys of nationalism, under Glanton,
the men’s performances exalt violence through the promise of economic profit. This commodification of brown bodies formalizes genocidal violence under the pretense of economic gain, benefiting Anglo outsiders whose racial pedigree and profit incentives privilege these atrocities as lucrative investments.

Additionally, this chapter proposes that the figure of Judge Holden elevates violence to both physical and epistemic terms in his role as the very “[e]thos of Manifest Destiny,” as literary scholar Robert L. Jarrett correctly describes him (*Cormac McCarthy* 77). This chapter adds that Holden operates as the standard-bearer against which future masculine performances must operate. The legitimacy of and justification for these violent machinations find footing both in the Judge’s own scientific empiricism as well as his invocation of a long-standing history of militant masculinity. War, alluded to metaphorically as the judge’s “dance,” sustains the homosocial relations of his male followers as they construct and perform their male codes. As this chapter will demonstrate, the judge’s recourse to arcane language and abstruse pseudo homilies configure him alternately as a type of antihero, inverted Christ, and would-be father, whose mandates to perpetuate this violent male trajectory guarantee the superordinancy of men, like himself, who seeks to preserve the “masquerade of naturalness” (Gardiner “Introduction” 8) that accompanies masculine power. Scholar Sara Spurgeon is thus correct to affirm that Judge Holden is “both a fictional version of a historical personage and an amalgamation of numerous archetypes from the mythic West” (“The Sacred Hunter” 78). 100 This case study, however, adds that this figure also reifies a hegemonic

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100 In his seminal *Notes on Blood Meridian*, John Emil Sepich traces the historical sources of several of McCarthy’s characters in the novel, and he identifies Samuel Chamberlain’s *My Confessions* as a key source used by McCarthy during his writing of *Blood Meridian*. 
masculine ideal by recourse to racial scapegoating, with the concomitant effect of strengthening male camaraderie through the imagined fraternal bonds of whiteness.

This chapter concludes by arguing that in spite of these deep-rooted structures, the hope for a new, non-violent masculinity centers upon the central character of the kid—the malleable protagonist who, while crossing the borders between Texas, Mexico, English, and Spanish, comes to cross the equally perilous border between the masculine licit and the masculine illicit. An examination of the novel’s hegemonic masculine figures exposes how the kid is doomed to the punishment that ensues from such a deviation—effectively eliminated by the very violence that he opposes. Additionally, the novel’s ambivalent epilogue thematizes a transmutation in what the Judge terms “sacred war,” from the territorial conquest of Manifest Destiny and the physical and epistemic violence that it entails, to an equally violent and encroaching capitalist enterprise.

III. Writing About History: Examining McCarthy’s Subject Position, the Diegetic Space of Blood Meridian, and the Western Genre

III.A. Cormac McCarthy: From Appalachia to the Southwest

As a historical novel, the text’s representation of masculinity construction and territorial expansion is not, of course, without historical precedent. Affirming that “Manifest Destiny forced the question of what both manhood and womanhood should look like, at home, and abroad” (14), historian Amy S. Greenburg argues in her book Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire that during the nineteenth century, “[t]he consolidation of national identity and the internal American categories of

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race, class, and gender occurred in a framework of expansionism and imperial domination” (14). Greenburg’s astute analysis merits extended citation:

The contested nature of manhood in the United States in the antebellum era helped shape the aggressive expansionist encounter with Latin America by suggesting that aggression against an unworthy foe was virtuous and by imagining Latin America as a place where brave, hard-working American men could succeed when their opportunities back home had been limited by increased competition and economic change. In their interactions with Latin American men and women, travelers from the United States reinforced their faith in their own courage, work ethic, and enlightenment, and they provided grounds for asserting that a marital aggressive manhood was the best manhood for the domination of the hemisphere. The frontier continued to be a place where a masculine practice organized around dominance made more sense than a masculine practice organized around expertise. Restrained masculinity was marginalized on the frontier at the same time that martial masculinity ... seemed to be marginalized at home. (178-9)

McCarthy’s text thematizes these anxieties and compulsions through the configuration of a young male protagonist whose trajectory as a nation-builder and defender occurs under the direction of three Anglo male leaders along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The fact that Cormac McCarthy is considered a border writer at all speaks to the multifaceted nature of border literature as a genre. While scholar Emily D. Hicks maintains that throughout much border literature “there is a refusal of the metonymic reduction in which a white, male, Western ‘subject’ dominates an object” (“Introduction”
McCarthy’s Blood Meridian actually showcases the opposite, first in the figures of Captain White and John Joel Glanton, and ultimately in the character of Judge Holden. Rather than celebrate the pervasive violence symptomatic of the mid-1800s border region, though, McCarthy’s novel explores the ubiquity of male-enacted violence as a resource both for Anglos’ conquest of the West and the subsequent process of nation building and defense—two phenomena that converge here with the Anglo male characters’ masculine performances beneath the gaze of their superiors. While Blood Meridian has steadily attracted critical attention since the warm reception of McCarthy’s border trilogy (1992-1999), the Southwest region has not consistently operated as a thematic staple in McCarthy’s fiction. In fact, it was only after his move to the Southwest in 1977 that McCarthy shifted his attention to that particular area, which has remained the setting for most of his subsequent novels. Still, readers must question what historical circumstances might have prompted McCarthy’s sudden shift, and what larger social and cultural conflicts likely informed the writing of Blood Meridian in the 1970s and 1980s.

A Caucasian native of Rhode Island and a recipient of numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship (1969) and a MacArthur “genius” Fellowship (1981), McCarthy briefly attended the University of Tennessee (Knoxville), served in the U.S. Air Force, moved from Tennessee to the U.S. Southwest, learned Spanish, and remained largely out of the national spotlight until the 1992 publication of All the Pretty Horses.}

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102 Sepich elaborates, “The scalp hunters’ problem ... arose in late 1849 and early 1850 as the scalp business peaked .... A ‘depletion’ of the number of Indians venturing into Mexico occurred, in part because of Chihuahua’s willingness to pay for the scalps of women and children, though at a rate below that for warriors ... Besides a large Indian population antedating Spanish settlement, Chihuahua was inhabited by mestizos, whose hair was similar to the Indians’ in color and texture. The hair of fighting and farming Indians looked about the same. And Glanton’s scalpers found this ‘problem’ of identification to be a boon, enriching their coffers with the surreptitious murder of Mexican citizens until their deceptions were discovered by the authorities” (8).

103 These books include All the Pretty Horses (1992), The Crossing (1994), and Cities of the Plain (1998).
Horses--a novel which earned him the National Book Award as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award, and consequently secured a future readership in both academic and non-academic circles. Blood Meridian (1985) did not garner McCarthy an immediate following. A grisly, complex historical novel taking place in the present-day borderlands shortly after the Mexican-American War (1846-48), the text offers a fictionalized narrative of the “Glanton Gang” scalp-hunting expedition--a little-studied paramilitary force that scalped Southwest Native Americans during the mid nineteenth-century. The text’s violence, as Harold Bloom has noted in his introductory essay to the novel, runs unparalleled in U.S. literature, yet he maintains that “[n]one of its carnage is gratuitous or redundant; it belonged to the Mexico-Texas borderlands in 1849-50” (vi). How, though, does McCarthy’s own subject position, so different from that of the other writers studied here, inform his narrative representation of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands? The questions are complex, but readers must consider key historical and social precedents that served as hallmarks in the decades preceding the novel’s publication, and that likely led McCarthy to focus on the violent exploits of the Glanton Gang at the birth of the modern-day U.S.-Mexico border.

104 Throughout his life, McCarthy has travelled frequently and has lived in numerous cities, both in the United States and abroad. A concise summary of McCarthy’s travels, his marriages and subsequent divorces, as well as the literary prizes he has accrued up to the early 1990s, can be found in chapter one of Robert L. Jarrett’s book, Cormac McCarthy.

105 Sepich writes, “The decade of the forties saw the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua, in its attempt to break the cycle of Indian incursions, hire Anglo aliens to kill the [Indian] raiders” (Notes on Blood Meridian 6). Sepich adds, “Chihuahua paid scalp bounties not only to licensed alien parties, but also to peon guerilla bands, who found that the governmental payment for a single scalp exceeded the amount that a peon who became a gang member [would earn by laboring] ... Chihuahua was desperate to have the Comanche invasion stopped. So aliens and peons--even some Indians--were paid by the scalp for their contribution to Chihuahua’s protection” (7). Neither the federal government of Mexico nor that of the United States officially sanctioned the expeditions (footnote 11, p.7).

106 Writing that McCarthy represents the historical John Glanton “with remarkable fidelity,” Sepich affirms that Glanton “applied for a [scalp-hunting] license on June 27 [of 1849]” and that for Glanton and his followers “[t]he morality of scalp hunting [was] not problematic” (Notes on Blood Meridian 5, 10). Sepich argues that it was likely the death of Glanton’s fiancée at the hands of Indians which led him to undertake
III.B. Border Conflicts (1950s-1980s) and the Writing of Blood Meridian

The decades between the writing of Caballero and the publication of Blood Meridian witnessed a number of social, political, and economic changes that affected the borderlands, its people, and the representation of both on the U.S. national stage. While racial discrimination against Latino/as diminished throughout the 1950s and 1960s, by 1969, those living in Texas border counties encountered other obstacles as they grappled with the most extreme poverty in the United States. Border demarcation too proved unstable and shifting, and it was only in 1970 that a number of lingering land disputes between Mexico and the U.S. were provisionally resolved for the first time since the signing of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Martínez Troublesome Border 29). Just as territorial demarcation shifted terrain, so too did people. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, U.S.-bound Mexican immigration increased, doing so at a time when the ubiquity of drug trafficking garnered national attention (see President Reagan’s aforecited comments) and when the border itself grew increasingly militarized in response to such changes. Perhaps most significant of all the historical events that informed the production of McCarthy’s text was the United States’ growing involvement in the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Scholar Megan Riley McGilchrist proposes that that the war’s corrupt “historical roots and ideological foundations” likely led McCarthy to intimate throughout Blood Meridian the scalp-hunting expedition, and his later recourse to killing Mexicans for profit was likely motivated by his “Texan background” (9).

107 Stanley R. Ross affirms that a study by the United States Commerce Department “identified three Texas border metropolitan areas as the poorest in the United States in 1969: McAllen, with annual personal income per capita at $2,343; Laredo, $2,516; and Brownsville, $2,607. For the United States as a whole, it was $4,045” (“Introduction” 10).

108 In their article concerning the evolution of U.S. immigration policies, Michael LaRosa and Lance R. Ingwersen write that President Reagan’s 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) “granted legal immigration status to some 2.7 million ‘unauthorized’ individuals” (“U.S. Immigration Policies in Historic Context” 253). Despite the fact that the legislation helped mostly poor Latino/as living and working in the Southwest, both scholars argue that Reagan’s deadly interventionist policies in several Central American countries prompted in large part the northward flow of Central American migrants and refugees (253).
Meridian the violent tenants of Manifest Destiny (The Western Landscape in Cormac McCarthy and Wallace Stegner 116). Contextualizing these historical junctures accordingly, we are better equipped to understand how McCarthy’s subject position informed his production of Blood Meridian. As a narrative focused entirely on the exploits of its Anglo male characters along the ambiguous mid 1800s border, the novel qualifies racialized violence and white masculinized nationalism as two domains that typify the larger ideology of Manifest Destiny.

Inspired largely by Samuel Chamberlain’s personal memoir My Confession, McCarthy’s novel interrogates the racial and nationalist ideologies that falsely legitimated and powerfully reinforced violent exploits throughout the borderlands during the mid to late 1800s. In The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West, historian Patricia Nelson Limerick contends that the U.S. conquest of the (South)west did not merely end, as historian Frederick Jackson Turner famously stated in his seminal 1893 essay, but rather remains uninterrupted (18). What is striking here is not particularly Limerick’s thesis, but rather the fact that it was published two years after McCarthy’s Blood Meridian—a fact that, according to McCarthy scholar Erik Hage, puts the novelist ahead of “new Western” historians, like Limerick, who advocate more critical attention to the violence, liminality, and gendered dimensions of the West and Southwest regions (Cormac McCarthy: A Literary Companion 32-33). Scholar Vereen

109 McGilchrist affirms that the novel’s treatment of Manifest Destiny—namely, the text’s exploration of “an inherent American right to Mexico’s land, and the scalp-hungers’ ‘right’ to both Mexican and Indian scalps”—is coterminous with the United States’ Cold War obsession with “making the world safe for democracy” (author’s emphasis 130).
110 Turner argued in his seminal 1893 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” that the ever-Westward moving frontier operated as “the line of most rapid and effective Americanization” (3) and that it simultaneously fostered both U.S. democracy and rugged individualism. It has since been rightly criticized for its imperialistic lens, limited geographical scope, and pro Anglo agenda (Slotkin Fatal Environment 42; Limerick Legacy of Conquest 21).
M. Bell makes a similar observation: “As a novel about the American west, Blood Meridian presses the psychology of the frontier theory to its logical, appalling extreme” (The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy 199). How, then, should readers assess the novel’s treatment of these themes in the larger contexts of border writing and, specifically, the Western genre?

III.C. The Western Genre and the Interrogation of American Exceptionalism

While Blood Meridian showcases Anglo-enacted violence against people of color as part and parcel of Manifest Destiny, it does so through a reconfiguration of the Western genre and its laudatory treatment of Anglo male protagonists.111 In this regard, I agree with Susan Kollin, who terms the novel an “anti-Western” and argues that McCarthy thematizes “a West fully corrupted from the moment Anglos arrived” (“Genre and Geographies of Violence” 561-2).112 Additionally, Kollin proposes that while Western narratives typically treat the landscape as an obstacle to be conquered by a male protagonist needing to prove his character, McCarthy’s Western landscape “is emptied of its sacred qualities, becoming instead a fully defiled, profaned space. And unlike Westerns that depict the region as a prelapsarian garden and space of retreat for the American hero, McCarthy’s text features an anti-Edenic landscape whose ownership is

111 In his book chapter “‘A false book is no book at all’: the ideology of representation in Blood Meridian and the Border Trilogy,” scholar David Holloway affirms a similar argument by observing, “There is the sustained assault on the notion of manifest destiny, a critique conducted in large part through McCarthy’s deconstruction of the Turner thesis, where frontier space is defined in a binary collision of savagery and civilization” (193).

112 Scholar Neil Campbell makes a similar assertion: “Part of what is being revised in McCarthy is a whole tradition of historiography, like Frederick Jackson Turner’s, predicated upon a narrative told by the victor in which the dominant story is represented as a triumphal procession” (“Liberty Beyond Its Proper Bounds” 217).
violently contested and overturned by the group of mercenaries” (562). How the novel represents violence in relation to this genre also demands attention.

In his article concerning the novel’s use of violence as a mechanism for nation-building, Steven Frye notes that McCarthy “is aware that he is working with ... a genre [the Western] that is mythologically constituted” but that characters such as “Judge Holden, and the kid clearly undermine the celebratory mythic conceptions of westward expansion” (“Poetics of Violence” 110). Other scholars have made similar observations. In her book chapter entitled “The Sacred Hunter and the Eucharist of the Wilderness: Mythic Reconstructions in Blood Meridian,” Sara Spurgeon maintains that McCarthy is “using the trope of the historic frontier and the landscape of the Southwest within the genre of the Western to interrogate the consequences of our acceptance of the archetypal Western hero myths” (76). In Spurgeon’s view, Blood Meridian functions as “countermemory” or an “antimyth of the west” (76) by countering the mythic hallmark of American exceptionalism—a position with which Timothy Parish would likely agree when one considers his argument that “[i]f American history is truly exceptional, ... its exceptionalism consists [throughout Blood Meridian] in its unmatched opportunity to destroy worlds in the name of making one that it names as itself” (“The First and Last Book of America” 87). Although Frye and Spurgeon correctly observe that McCarthy repudiates a glorified mythical West, they do not highlight masculinity construction as a component that sustains and promotes the violent actions of the texts Anglo male characters. This chapter responds to that void, examining how the idealization and

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113 There is some debate about the semantics of how we should classify McCarthy’s novel. Contrasting Kollin, Robert L. Jarrett labels the novel a “revisionary western”—a “postmodern form of the historical romance”—in the sense that it “begins its revisionary project in its selection of narrative materials to tell a story (not The Story) of the Southwest, avoiding the well-covered ranching era after the Civil War to focus on the largely ignored era of Manifest Destiny” (Cormac McCarthy 74).
emulation of hegemonic male archetypes validate these behaviors within the context of nation building and defense.

As we have seen, McCarthy’s subject-position affords him a particular historical vantage point in which increased Mexican immigration, border militarization, drug trafficking, and renewed Anglo nativism converge with larger national anxieties advanced in large part by the United States’ military involvement in Vietnam. How, then, does McCarthy represent such history through the intersection of violence and masculinity construction in Blood Meridian?

IV. “A taste for mindless violence”: Early Representations of the Protagonist and Violence in Blood Meridian

The diegetic space of the novel’s opening pages takes place in 1833, in a remote and unnamed region of Tennessee. The unknown narrator introduces readers to the novel’s protagonist—“the child”, whose mother died in childbirth and whose father never utters the name of his deceased wife (Blood Meridian 3). The narrator commands readers’ attention by first issuing a mandate and then supplementing this directive with a series of troubling revelations regarding the novel’s protagonist: “See the child. He is pale and thin, he wears a thin and ragged linen shirt” (3). The narrator reveals neither the personal history of the child, nor the collective history of his family, affirming only that “his father has been a schoolmaster” and that “he quotes from poets whose names are now lost” (3). The lack of nomenclature characterizing our first encounters with these male characters reinforces the ambiguity that shrouds their shared history. Readers are led to believe that in spite of the father’s seemingly privileged background, his son will encounter a very different future, a suspicion compounded by the narrator’s disturbing revelation that the child “can neither read nor write and in him broods already a taste for
mindless violence” (3). In its exploration of the young protagonist’s poverty, the text also establishes a historical continuity shared between fathers and sons: “All history,” the narrator proposes, presents itself somewhere within “that visage, the child the father of the man” (3). This immediate male-focused conjecture foreshadows what Shaw, in his article concerning male-to-male sexual violence in the novel, terms the “androcentric code of the West”: a code that, in Shaw’s view, the kid largely defends (“The Kid’s Fate, the Judge’s Guilt” 111). Still, however much the historical record might arise from a symbiotic relationship between fathers and sons, readers soon learn that the child runs away, eschewing his negligent father in pursuit of other masculine models.

By doing so, the child’s actions give primacy to a pattern of physical violence that he must adopt in the early phases of his own masculinity construction as he navigates uncertain terrain, from Memphis, to St. Louis, to New Orleans, and ultimately to Texas. The narrator informs readers that somewhere around New Orleans, the kid “hears tongues he has not heard before,” and that “he comes down at night like some fairybook beast to fight with the sailors” (Blood Meridian 4). The descriptions that ensue assure readers that in spite of the child’s physical limitations and lack of experience, he is

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114 In her article “Genres and Geographies of Violence: Cormac McCarthy and the Contemporary Western,” scholar Susan Kollin remarks in regards to the novel’s opening pages that “the novel’s beginning also establishes the main character as a corrupted reversal of Huck Finn, the nation’s most famous boy narrator. By recasting the voice of wonder associated with Huck, McCarthy unsettles the comfort and solace that the youthful point of view typically provides Anglo audiences” (566).

115 Robert L. Jarrett observes in his book that the ending of Suttree, McCarthy’s last novel set in Appalachia, and the beginning of Blood Meridian, McCarthy’s first novel set in the Southwest, share an interesting structural link. The conclusion of the former sees its protagonist depart Knoxville, Tennessee, for the West, while the latter bears witness to its child protagonist departing a rural section of Tennessee for Texas. Both, Jarrett conjectures, parallel the author’s own life, since it was after the publication of the former that McCarthy moved west himself, abandoning his thematic focus on Appalachia (Cormac McCarthy 63).
able to nonetheless allocate social capital through the common bond of male-on-male violence: 116

He is not big but he has big wrists, big hands. His shoulders are set close. The child’s face is curiously untouched behind the scars, the eyes oddly innocent. They fight with fists, with teeth, with bottles or knives, all races, all breeds. Men from lands so far and queer that standing over them where they lie bleeding in the mud he feels mankind itself vindicated. (4)

To readers’ shock, an unidentified character later shoots the child just below the heart, and the latter survives only after a tavernkeeper’s wife nurses him back to health. The novel’s representation of physical violence as a phenomenon that instigates homosocial interaction is compounded by the narrator’s assertion that racial pedigrees do not impede this common feature of the male-dominated landscape. Whereas the opening pages of the novel highlight the protagonist’s economic poverty and lack of social capital, his recourse to physical violence here allows the child to establish himself within a male hierarchy that does not include his biological father. In fact, the alert reader notices that only after these initial violent encounters is the child able to overcome any antecedent influences: “Only now is the child finally divested of all that he has been. His origins are become remote as is his destiny and not again in all the world’s turning will there be terrains so wild and barbarous to try whether the stuff of creation may be shaped to man’s will” (4-5). The initial pages of the text establish a series of narrative ambiguities by occluding the protagonist’s history, concealing his identity, and positing a trajectory of personal growth

116 In this regard, I agree with Timothy Parrish, who contends that “[a]t war in the novel are people from radically different civilizations with radically different concepts of time and space” and that McCarthy illuminates how diverse groups of people “assert their identity and thus their history through acts of violence” (“The First and Last Book of America” 85).
within the confines of an already troubled father-son course. More importantly, though, the text goes on to configure the landscape (only later do we learn that it is the borderlands) in terms that invert a divine hierarchy, rendering the region “the stuff of creation” to be “shaped by man’s will” (5). In tandem with the text’s homosocial milieu, the emerging autonomy of the protagonist via a “regeneration through violence,”¹¹⁷ suggests that whoever’s authority emerges must do so from within this father-son trajectory along a borderlands “where death seem[s] the most prevalent feature of the landscape” (48).¹¹⁸ The child’s psychological development remains occluded from beginning to end, and readers are forced to gauge his development based either on the narrator’s sparse descriptions of his actions, his limited dialogue, or the author’s sweeping descriptions of violence against a landscape devoid of any moral order.

Still, in spite of these ambiguities, readers are overcome by what Harold Bloom has termed “the overwhelming carnage that McCarthy portrays” throughout Blood Meridian. Indeed, as the narrative progresses, the author increasingly aestheticizes violence without punctuating these descriptions with insight into his characters’ individual psychologies. In response to this absence, readers are forced to examine how the male characters manage violence, against whom, under what compulsions, and for what purposes. McCarthy has rarely commented on his writing process, let alone his thematic preoccupation with violence, but in a rare interview with The New York Times on 19 April 1992, the author rather cryptically emphasized the productive and normative

¹¹⁷ Historian and literary critic Richard Slotkin popularized the term “regeneration through violence.” For more information on this concept, consult chapter 4 of his book The Fatal: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization (1800-1890), as well as Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier (1600-1860).

¹¹⁸ In his book chapter entitled “All the Pretty Horses, the Border, and Ethnic Encounter,” scholar Nicholas Monk argues that the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in McCarthy’s work “create seemingly endless iterations of a contact zone that involves, not only the United States and Mexico, but Native American peoples, colonial influence, and a vast ... history ... [whose] common feature that unites all ... is blood” (130).
nature of physical violence: “There’s no such thing as life without bloodshed,” McCarthy affirmed, adding that “the notion that the species can be improved in some way, that everyone could live in harmony, is a really dangerous idea” (“Cormac McCarthy’s Venomous Fiction”). McCarthy’s comments here combined with the ubiquity of violence throughout his novels, particularly *Blood Meridian*, have long garnered the attention of critics who have prematurely qualified the latter as puzzling at best and gratuitous at worst.

Rick Wallach, for one, speaks of the “outlandish violence” that permeates *Blood Meridian* (“From *Beowulf* to *Blood Meridian*” 199), while Kenneth Lincoln refers to the text’s ubiquitous bloodshed as “mindless violence” (*Cormac McCarthy: American Canticles* 83). In a similar vein, Megan Riley McGilchrist comments that the male characters in the novel “commit acts of carnage for no recognizable reason” (*The Western Landscape in Cormac McCarthy and Wallace Stegner* 132); and while *The New York Times* reporter Richard W. Woodward, to whom McCarthy gave the aforementioned interview, is correct in his assertion that “[t]here are no heroes in this vision of the American frontier,” he too fails to consider the mechanisms that compel the male characters to draw recourse to such violence in the first place: *Blood Meridian*, Woodward argues, “explores the nature of evil and the allure of violence. Page after page, it presents the regular, and often senseless, slaughter that went on among white, Hispanic and Indian groups” (Cormac McCarthy’s Venomous Fiction”). Contrasting these claims, the present study proposes that the novel explores the configuration of both physical and epistemic violence in the guise of three male archetypes. The kid’s fascination with, and compulsion to enact, physical violence under the leadership of each
operates as masculine resources among men who not only share his attraction, but also perform and manage violence in ways that reinforce their roles as nation-building or defending actors.\textsuperscript{119} The kid’s demise in the concluding chapter affirms both physical and epistemic violence as inveterate features of this androcentric code, forestalling any aberrations and ensuring a trajectory of Anglo male hegemony in the borderlands.

If for the kid physical violence functions as a sort of pedagogical absolute, its presence and efficacy grow exponentially as he advances within the novel’s masculine milieu. Readers learn that as the kid imitates the behaviors of his counterparts and partakes in the pursuit of those deemed other, his own identity category fluctuates: he is alternately labeled as the child, the kid, el muchacho, the man, and el hombre joven, depending upon the acts he performs within the social environments that he is forced to navigate. Here, however, the alert reader should question what broader constructions of power operate at such crossings—and at whose expense—within the United States’ recently acquired Southwestern territory. In addition, we should remain conscious of how these configurations of gendered power shape the masculine ideal that the kid seeks to emulate in this contentious contact zone.

In his study concerning bodily abjection and border power dynamics in Chicano literature, Arturo J. Aldama argues that crucial to the border narrative is an understanding of the border as “a free zone of violence” that “forces discourse of inferiorization on Mexicans and other Latinos, especially those whose class position, ethnicity, and skin color” render them subservient beneath the alleged superiority of their Anglo

\textsuperscript{119} The comments of masculinity scholar Harry Brod prove especially helpful in this analysis. In his article “Studying Masculinities as Superordinate Studies,” Brod highlights the advantages of maintaining the status quo of a particular masculine script: “For if one speaks in harmony with the established order, one’s voice blends smoothly into the chorus, but if one’s speech is out of sync with that order, it grates on the ears of those who remain in sync” (171).
counterparts ("Millennial Anxieties" 15). Aldama’s comments prove just as insightful in our approach to *Blood Meridian*. The kid’s recourse to physical violence against colored borderland dwellers possesses a doubly pragmatic function: it initially operates as both a nation building and defending resource, but it also allows him to acclimate to the environment of his equally aggressive Anglo male superiors who fill the void of the child’s father. It comes as little surprise, then, that the kid soon physically confronts Mexicans in ways that endorse his own masculinity.

Shortly after learning to understand physical violence as somehow exonerative, the still-monolingual kid attempts to buy a drink from a Mexican barman in chapter II. Here, the kid asks if he “speaks american” (*Blood Meridian* 23), and when the surrounding Mexicans laugh, the kid reacts in a manner consonant with what the other Anglo males have previously sanctioned to the detriment of their Mexican counterparts—or the “race of degenerates,” as Captain White terms them (34). In addition to the aforementioned ambiguities, McCarthy adds yet another through the contact of English and Spanish, a process that directly impinges on the protagonist’s masculinity construction. As Adrian V. Fielder observes in her article concerning *Blood Meridian*’s account of history, the child “has stumbled into a world he is unable to interpret” and “[t]his is rendered immediately apparent on the level of language, for the characters’ dialogue with natives and Mexicans is reported verbatim in Spanish and is not translated” (“Historical Representation and the Scriptural Economy of Imperialism” 32-3), a

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120 Particularly relevant to the portrayal of McCarthy’s men and the articulation of their masculinities is Aldama’s emphasis on Anglo power dynamics along the border and his claim that “the trajectories of an overculture end only to then regenerate themselves in the ... desecration of the Other” (“Millennial Anxieties” 21). Jonathan Imber Shaw would agree. In his article entitled “Evil Empires: *Blood Meridian*, War in El Salvador, and the Burdens of Omiscience,” Shaw argues that Glanton’s gang, both historically and in McCarthy’s novel, undertook an “exploitation and extermination of mestizo peoples” in Mexico in order to falsely claim their scalps as those of Southwest Indians (211). Such actions, Shaw affirms, “provided a manifest form of the population’s disappearance from the American cultural memory” (211).
mechanism that allows non-Spanish-speaking readers to share the uncomprehending perspective of the kid. Even so, this lack of transparency and inability to partake in language kinship does not prevent the kid from establishing camaraderie with other Anglo men through the common bond of physical violence. Indeed, the reader is shocked to read that the kid “backhanded [a] bottle across the barman’s skull and crammed the jagged remnant into his eye” (Blood Meridian 25-6). As he had earlier hoped, this act “vindicates” him, thereby securing his eligibility for entrance into Captain White’s military faction.\textsuperscript{121} Far from serving as merely cathartic or compensatory, then, physical violence operates here as a mechanism that inaugurates males into manhood.

V. Anglo Hegemonic Masculinities along the Borderlands

V.A. Captain White: Nationalism, the Construction of Otherness, and the Profanation of Sacred Space

As the first would-be father to the young protagonist, Captain White endorses physical violence as a masculine resource against the backdrop of nationalism, otherness, and territorial expansion. While the text represents the kid’s biological father as negligent, aloof in his responsibilities, and emotionally defeated following his wife’s death, Captain White represents a sharp contrast by offering the kid both mentorship and male camaraderie. The initial configuration of male-enacted violence in Blood Meridian manifests itself in physical terms: White uses damming anti-Mexican stereotypes to bolster his own brand of American exceptionalism. This operates in conjunction with condoned acts of aggression as a sort of blueprint for the kid as he constructs his own

\textsuperscript{121} Sepich affirms, “The existence of Captain White’s filibustering expedition into Sonora in the spring of 1849 is not verifiable. A nonmilitary and presumably illegally constituted troop of freebooters that was attacked and virtually wiped out by Indians in the desolate eastern Chihuahua country would leave few traced in the record” (Notes on Blood Meridian 20). For more information, consult chapter 2 of Notes on Blood Meridian.
masculine identity in an increasingly profane region. Readers soon learn that the text’s representation of space prefaces the arrival of Captain White, and for good reason. Though the novel refrains from psychological introspection, its frequent allusions to the landscape force readers to examine the evolution of the kid in masculinist terms as he grapples with the compulsions to enact physical violence in accordance with Captain White’s directives.

The narrator’s description of the physical landscape in chapter IV, for example, configures a metonymic association between the westward moving trajectories of the male characters and the rising of the sun itself: the narrator affirms that the “sun rose out of nothing like the head of a great red phallus until it cleared the unseen rim and sat squat and pulsing and malevolent behind [the men]” (Blood Meridian 44). McCarthy’s clever correlation of the rising of the sun with the arrival of the son qualifies the management of borderland violence as a part of the kid’s own masculinity construction. More importantly, though, the author’s use of phallic language foregrounds the ensuing scalp hunting expedition as an exclusively homosocial undertaking, the westward movement of which necessarily entails a crossing over the titular blood meridian. McCarthy’s prose, though, is more biblical in its scope than it is wantonly sexual--and for good reason.

The author’s use of religious language highlights the mythic conception of the West at the same time that it aestheticizes the ubiquitous violence along the border. The narrator’s description of a Mexican Catholic Church in chapter II configures its desecration as a forfeiture of sanctified space, thus ensuring the abjection of the Mexican faithful and the subsequent erasure of the Church’s moral codes: “The facade of the building bore an array of saints in their niches and they had been shot up by American
troops trying their rifles ... a carved stone Virgin held in her arms a headless child” (Blood Meridian 23). This representation of space holds important implications for the men as they construct and perform their masculine identities. As David G. Pugh explains, “The undefiled West was a refuge for threatened men, but it was also, and more importantly, an adversary to be conquered, a resource to be plundered and plowed” (Sons of Liberty 11). Just as the text recasts the sacred refuge of the church as a profane testing ground for Anglo men, it nonetheless incorporates religious language in order to thematize the quasi-religious nature of this new male group, much as when the kid is described as “some wholly wretched baptismal candidate” as he enters the desecrated church (Cormac McCarthy 26-7). The juxtaposition of the church’s destruction with the representation of the kid as an aspirant to some unifying quasi-religious order lays the groundwork for his forthcoming adoption of new behaviors that reflect the violent directives of his male leaders. McCarthy’s portrayal of his young protagonist in these terms corroborates the notion that the kid becomes gendered—masculinized—and retains the corresponding identity category through the repetition of an antecedent code—in a similar manner as that through which the Christian convert is told to imitate Christ. Indeed, readers later learn in chapter XII that the men, under the direction of John Glanton, “rode like men invested with a purpose whose origins were antecedent to them, like blood legatees of an order both imperative and remote” (152). The text’s emphasis on a homosocial male order and its compulsions, both of which antedate the arrival of these male adherents, works to sabotage the authority of the Church, its claims to sacramity, and the moral imperatives that structure both. This new order, the novel assures

122 These comments are also synonymous with Michael Kimmel’s observation that throughout the nineteenth century, “The West was a safety valve [in the United States], siphoning off excess population, providing an outlet for both the ambitious and the unsuccessful” (Manhood in America 60).
us, configures itself within the pseudo religion directed by the novel’s three violent masculine models.

It comes as no surprise, then, that throughout Blood Meridian, the blood of the sacrificial Lamb lacks redemptive potential—a fact about which McCarthy never ceases to remind the reader. In chapter VIII, an elderly Mexican man affirms, “Blood. This country is give much blood. This Mexico. This is a thirsty country. The blood of a thousand Christs. Nothing” (Blood Meridian 102). The kid first encounters such sacrifice in the blood of Mexicans, a people whom Captain White labels a “people so cowardly they’ve paid tribute a hundred years to tribes of naked savages” (33). The borderlands of Blood Meridian offer few, if any, places of refuge for those who are non-Anglo, which might explain why McCarthy highlights the Mexican churches themselves as places of an ever more fragile sanctuary. By robbing the Southwest of its sacred places, the text configures the borderlands as an arena in which Anglo men are able to affirm their individual and collective identities through compulsory calls to violent masculine performance, all without the fear of retributive punishment.

The text’s early configuration of space, gender, and race foreground the kid’s individual trajectory within the narrative tensions that stem from each: sacred / profane, feminine / masculine, Anglo / Mexican. Because the novel privileges an incipient nationalism through the figure of Captain White, the kid encounters an array of borders—linguistic, racial, geographic, and religious—separating Anglo men from the abjected Mexican “barbarians,” to use Captain White’s own terminology (Blood Meridian 33). While the narrator attests in the opening pages of the novel to a continuity of history through the prism of father-son relations, the schism between the kid and his biological
father forces the former to seek mentorship through other male figures. Captain White fills this void, and he does so by acting through an ideological framework that conjoins the racial tenets of nineteenth-century American exceptionalism with the physical violence demanded by his own brand of militant masculinity. Because of this juxtaposition, readers encounter the imposition of what Aldama terms an “overculture” (“Millennial Anxieties” 21)--that is, a dominant framework that gives rise to a perceived otherness through “the overculture’s recreation” (Penn-Hilden “How the Border Lies” 163) and from the inability of a marginalized culture to integrate or be integrated within the existing cultural hegemony. Thus, if “being a man” proceeds from the performative effects of “becoming a man,” the kid is forced to take part in a series of atrocities aimed at those who lack the social and political capital reserved for those, like Captain White, who not only mediate the kid’s perception of manhood, but also reinforce it through calls to violent nationalism.  

Physical violence, then, inaugurates the kid into Captain White’s all-male faction, an event that readers encounter in chapter II. Here, a former slave owner recognizes the kid as “the feller [who] knocked in that Mexer’s head”, informing him that Captain White “wants to sign [him] up to join the army” (*Blood Meridian* 29). Although the kid is initially hesitant, the slave owner reassures him that “[i]t’s a chance for ye to raise ye self in the world” (29). Through their exchange, the text reassures readers that the expedition guarantees an exclusively homosocial environment within which the kid must continue to construct a masculine persona under the approving gaze of a militant, nationalist superior. In her discussion of the history of masculinity studies, gender scholar Karen Gardiner

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123 R.W. Connell notes that “even before this frontier closed, with military defeat of the native peoples and the spread of white settlement across the continent, frontiersmen were being promoted as exemplars of masculinity” (*Masculinities* 194).
argues that “gender forms through power relationships that are mobile and both temporally and site specific” (“Introduction” 14). With the importance of site in mind, then, readers should question how such power relations function along the U.S.-Mexico border in *Blood Meridian*. That the kid seeks acceptance and camaraderie in a region bereft of sanctified space and shrouded by intermittent violence forces us to analyze the aggressive Anglo masculinities that function and are promoted at such crossroads.

Though the kid’s father does not receive praise from either the narrator or the text’s other characters, such is not the case for Captain White, whose surname unapologetically reinforces the dichotomy between the white, Christian men and their “barbarian” other(ed) counterparts. In fact, the initial reverence of White works to sediment a childlike fidelity between himself and his allegiants. The slaveholder recalls, “If I’d not run up on Captain White I don’t know where I’d be this day. I was a sorrier sight even than what you are and he come along and raised me up like Lazarus. Set my feet in the path of righteousness ... He seen something in me worth savin and I see it in you” (*Blood Meridian* 33). The character’s use of religious language accentuates the quasi-religious father-son parallels, while the subsequent “path of righteousness” operates, as Timothy Parrish notes, within “the language of Manifest Destiny” (“The First and Last Book of America” 93). With the absence of holy places in mind, readers understand the text’s religious language as a tool that draws parallels between the kid’s salvation and the militant masculinity that he must adopt. Here, the slaying of Mexican nationals (a people, we later learn, whose racial miscegenation and Catholic loyalties allegedly render them incapable of self-governance) allows the kid to demonstrate these
capacities. In fact, Captain White justifies his expedition by profiling Mexicans as both
godless and politically inferior:

We fought for it. Lost friends and brothers down there. And then by God if we
didn’t give it back. Back to a bunch of barbarians that even the most biased in their
favor will admit have no least notion in God’s earth of honor or justice or the
meaning of republican government. (*Blood Meridian* 33)¹²⁴

White’s damning rationale bolsters the validity of his own expedition while
simultaneously promoting the border as, to again use Aldama’s words, a “seat of power
that selectively privileges and marginalizes” (“Millennial Anxieties” 14).

As this project has previously argued, the construction of any gender code
emerges from the processes of accountability that an individual encounters within a
specific social milieu. With this in mind, readers soon realize that the kid’s approval by
his newfound model formalizes his acceptance into the military group. When Captain
White asks if he is, in fact, “the man” reputed to have killed Mexicans in the barroom
brawl, the kid considers such a label suspect: “What man?” he asks (*Blood Meridian* 32).
This confusion demonstrates a type of intermediacy regarding the protagonist’s
masculine standing in that he is no longer a child, though not yet a man. Soon, the captain
supplies the kid with a saddle and replaces his mule with a horse (35), suggesting that if
the latter is to be a man who will “leave [his] mark on the world,” he must first be
equipped to play the part—costume and all.

¹²⁴ Noting the obsession for acquisition of territory that is often a key part of hegemonic masculinity,
Connell argues that that “[l]oss of control at the frontier is a recurring theme in the history of empires, and
is closely connected with the making of masculine exemplars” (*Masculinities* 187). Amy S. Greenburg
echoes a similar sentiment. In *Manifest Manhood*, she contends, “By feminizing Native Americans, white
Americans could prove themselves to be the legitimate possessors of American land. This gender dynamic
would help propel American expansion westward. Faith in the racial superiority of the Anglo-Saxon and in
the inferiority of the ‘mixed race’ peoples of Latin America easily translated into a gendered vision of the
dominant American when expansionists turned to the south” (22).
As the text increasingly makes evident, to become a man, the kid must faithfully imitate the violent exploits of the other men around him, even if he never explicitly shares the racialized nationalism of his counterparts. Equally important, though, is Captain White’s caustic judgment of Mexicans, and how this discursive dehumanization reinforces a volatile nationalism that validates violent U.S. intervention in Mexican affairs. Consider White’s statements to the kid in chapter III, which, on the one hand, configure Mexico as a repository of virgin land ripe for the taking, and on the other, posit the Mexicans who occupy that land as an incompetent collective of miscegenated others:

Hell fire son, you wont need no wages. You get to keep everything you can raise. We goin to Mexico. Spoils of war. Aint a man in the company wont come out a big landowner. How much land you own now? (Blood Meridian 30)

What we are dealing with ... is a race of degenerates. A mongrel race, little better than niggers. And maybe no better. There is no government in Mexico. Hell, there’s no god in Mexico. Never will be. We are dealing with a people manifestly incapable of governing themselves. And do you know what happens with people who cannot govern themselves? That’s right. Others come in to govern for them. (33-4)

The carnage of White’s expedition bolsters its justification upon a series of damning dichotomies (us / them, American / Mexican, white / dark), and by doing so, it lauds a
binaristic paradigm that ignores its own superficial configuration when compared, for example, with the religious framework of select non-Anglos.\footnote{In her discussion of the Coatlicue State, a paradigm that might ideally transcend these deep-seated binaries, feminist and border scholar Gloria Anzaldúa criticizes the alleged impermeability of these moral binarisms, alleging that “[t]he dualism of light/darkness did not arise as a symbolic formula for morality until primordial darkness had been split into light and dark” \cite{Anzaldúa:71}. Anzaldúa’s insight calls our attention to the arbitrary nature of these racial demarcations while nonetheless affirming their deep-seated power, especially along the border region.}

In its narrativization of the homosocial scalp-hunting expedition’s activities, the novel unveils the mimetic practices that underlie the processes of masculinity construction that each male character undertakes, often through the scapegoating and abjection of racialized others. Speaking to the kid in chapter III, White boasts that he is “seldom mistaken in a man” \cite{Blood Meridian:35}, thus foreshadowing the kid’s hyper-attentiveness to this militant male code and the “black and white truths of American exceptionalism,” to use John Dudley’s phrase, that it seeks to uphold (“McCarthy’s Heroes” 183). In his brief time as the men’s hegemonic leader, Captain White posits Mexicans as individuals who merit the homicidal atrocities that await them. By virtue of its metonymic association with her citizens, Mexico increasingly acquires status as a type of repository for warranted violence, a profane space wherein a boy-becoming-man can “leave [his] mark on the world” under the direction of a would-be father \cite{Meridian:35}. The perceived necessity of physical violence coupled with such caustic nationalistic discourse falsely legitimize the binary separating the Anglo men from their Mexican counterparts, whose alleged cultural and racial retrograde beseech U.S. intervention.

In fact, the text’s description of the Anglo men and the landscape confirm this gradual depletion of moral prudence. The narrator writes that the men “slept with their alien hearts beating in the sand like pilgrims” \cite{Blood Meridian:46}, later describing the
terrain in which they travel as “a land of some other order out there whose true geology was not stone but fear” (47). In spite of the author’s reticence to provide insight into the kid’s psychological workings, his ornate descriptions of the borderlands and its interracial violence require readers to decipher this alleged “other order”. In one of the most cited passages of the novel, McCarthy represents the text’s first Native American attack against Captain White and his men in precisely these terms:

A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, half naked or clad in costumes attic or biblical or wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella and one in white stocking and a bloodstained weddingveil and some in headgear of cranefeathers or rawhide helmets that bore the horns of bull or buffalo and one in a pigeontailed coat worn backwards and otherwise naked and one in the armor of a spanish conquistador, the breastplate and pualdrons deeply dented with old blows of mace or sabre done in another country by men whose very bones were dust and many with their braids spliced up with the hair of other beasts until they trailed upon the ground and their horses’ ears and tails worked with bits of brightly colored cloth and one whose horse’s whole head was painted crimson red and all the horsemen’s faces gaudy and grotesque with daubings like a company of mounted clowns, death hilarious, all howling in a barbarous tongue and riding down upon them like a horde from a hell more horrible yet than the brimstone land of christian reckoning, screeching and
yammering and clothed in smoke like those vaporous beings in regions beyond
right where the eye wanders and the lip jerks and drools. (52-3)

Locking readers’ attention through its melodic cadence, the text’s polysyndetic prose aestheticizes the carnage of intermittent warfare to the caliber of biblical prophecy. In doing so, it advances the male trajectory begun within the novel’s opening pages, assuring readers that the only semblance of order in the profane space of the borderlands emerges from a type of atavistic chaos among competing groups of men—Spanish, Native American, Mexican, and Anglo. In spite of these biblical underpinnings, though, the passage here ironizes Christian binaries through a series of clever antitheses. The text confounds simple notions of good and evil, of right and wrong, as the men battle for survival and supremacy in the contentious contact zone. Death is “death hilarious”, Native American warriors are “mounted clowns”, and their faces are both “gaudy and grotesque” (52-3). Readers are shocked to encounter a panoply of atrocities as appalling as the prose is rich and archaic, but the latter works to configure the landscape in precisely these profane and anarchic terms. In fact, the paroxysms described here function as a sort of primer for the kid, since it is here where he first encounters warfare under the guidance of his first would-be father. This event conditions him for the remainder of the text’s bloody encounters, tests his fidelity to the group, and ultimately gauges his very survival skills with no psychological penetration for readers to calibrate his emotional investment or reservations. We are left only with the author’s grandiose treatment of the borderlands.

Throughout Blood Meridian, borderland conflict lacks reprieve, implicating its male actors in a landscape devoid of any transcendental moral order, a position that the
author makes increasingly evident through his representation of the landscape. Shortly after this initial Native American attack, for example, the kid encounters “a bush that was hung with dead babies ... These small victims, seven, eight of them, had holes punched in their underjaws and were hung so by their throats from the broken stobs of mesquite to stare eyeless at the naked sky” (*Blood Meridian* 57). Even here, the text never penetrates the kid’s psychology (we read only that he “looked back” 57), thereby forcing readers to interrogate the extent and limits of his development as he searches for new would-be fathers. The death of Captain White forces the kid to search for new male models, but the process of doing so grows increasingly bleak. In fact, this sudden paternal void strongly correlates with the absence of any metaphysical deity.

The novel’s depiction of the Native Americans’ attack on borderland Mexicans confirms as much. Here, McCarthy elevates this paternal void to religious terrain, configuring the “God of the Mexicans” as an absentee Father (much like the kid’s own biological father in chapter I):

There were no pews in the church and the stone floor was heaped with the scalped and naked and partly eaten bodies of some forty souls who’d barricaded themselves in this house of God against the heathen. The savages had hacked holes in the roof and shot them down from above and the floor was littered with arrowshafts where they’d snapped them off to get the clothes from the bodies. The altars had been hauled down and the tabernacle looted and the great sleeping God of the Mexicans routed from his golden cup. The primitive painted saints in their frames hung cocked on the walls as if an earthquake had visited and a dead Christ
in a glass bier lay broken in the chancel floor. The murdered lay in a great pool of their communal blood. (*Blood Meridian* 60)

As the text progresses, and as the kid himself constructs his masculine persona, the landscape increasingly loses its ultimate vestiges of sanctified space and any attendant moral codes. In fact, the desecration of holy space here manifests itself in both imminent and transcendental terms, thereby paralleling (if not parodying) the hypostasis of “the great sleeping God of the Mexicans”. In physical terms, the statues of saints lie shattered and the church altar disheveled, whereas in questions of metaphysical presence, “a great pool of [the Mexicans’] communal blood” replaces the holy Eucharist. McCarthy never calibrates the kid’s emotional investment, instead limiting readers’ knowledge to a mere qualifier: “the kid just shook his head” (60), in much the same way that he had only “looked back” at the dead infants three pages before. Rather than include narrative techniques that allow readers to explore the kid’s psychological reservations, McCarthy uses the landscape as a mirror or blueprint for his young protagonist, much as when the narrator describes the latter “scanning the landscape for some guidance in that emptiness” (67).

After White’s death in battle and the subsequent regrouping of the men under the even more violent John Joel Glanton,126 we notice, again, the mimetic nature of the men’s desires, and more importantly, the compulsions that result in acts of physical violence as they perform their masculinities. The insights of René Girard again prove particularly relevant in our approach. In Girard’s model, we recall, individuals imitate the desires that

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126 In *Notes on Blood Meridian*, John Emil Sepich writes, “Cormac McCarthy’s gang leader is a historical figure. His name punctuates any number of histories of the mid-nineteenth-century Southwest. He appears, for example, as a character in Jeremiah Clemens’s 1856 romance *Bernard Lile*. As recently as 1956 he was featured in *Life* magazine as a character in the serialization of Samuel Chamberlain’s long-lost personal narrative of the late 1840s, *My Confession*” (5).
emanate from their models and maintain social equilibrium by directing their aggression on marginal figures who function as scapegoats (*Violence and the Sacred*) 127.

Consequently, violence, as *Blood Meridian* makes clear, functions pragmatically by ensuring communal continuity and by fostering fraternal bonds among the Anglo men. Understood accordingly, the violence in *Blood Meridian* reinforces the Anglo border conception of masculinity through the elimination of the othered and abjected scapegoats. Sanctioned by unanimous participation, violence achieves what Girard terms the “restoration of peace and order,” and as a result, “the false premises that it maintains acquire, in consequence, an impregnable authority” (*Violence and the Sacred* 83). In this regard, the kid may be said to perform his violent acts because, as Girard argues, “he desires being, something he himself lacks and which [his model] seems to possess” (146). Indeed, McCarthy’s men display a hyper-fidelity not only to the type of man they aspire to become, but also to the necessarily violent means by which such becoming is made possible at all. The kid can become a man along the ill-defined border between the U.S. and Mexico only to the extent that he respects the rigidity of the border between the masculine licit and the masculine illicit.

**V.B. John Joel Glanton: Commodifying Brown Bodies and Calibrating Genocidal Violence as Masculine Praxis**

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127 In his study of the frontier myth and its role in U.S. history, Richard Slotkin affirms a structural relationship in American myths pitting Anglos against Indians that bears a strong resemblance to Girard’s scapegoating thesis. Slotkin affirms: “In American mythology, the Indian war also provides a symbolic surrogate for a range of domestic social and political conflicts. By projecting the ‘fury’ of domestic social and political conflicts outward against the Indian, the American expands his nation’s resources and thereby render class struggle unnecessary. All the antipathies that make for Revolutionary Terror and/or dictatorial oppression in Europe are projected onto the American savage, who becomes the only obstacle to the creation of a perfect republic. But this historical myth and its hopeful political scenario can only be realized so long as a frontier exists: a reservoir of natural resources sufficient to requite the ambitions of all classes without prejudice to the interests of any” (*Gunfighter Nation* 13).
The foil of Captain White disturbs the text’s promised father-son trajectory, and it forces the kid to grapple with this sudden lack of mentorship in a country that is not his own under captors who do not speak his native tongue. Though readers might anticipate the Mexicans here to regard the kid and his fellow Anglos in contempt, the intermittent warfare along the borderlands between Native Americans and outside parties (both Mexican and U.S. nationals) offers the protagonist an ironic haven through the promise of pledged genocide. Readers learn that a young Spanish-speaking Anglo falsely affirms to his Mexican captors that he and his compatriots are “seasoned indiannkiller[s]”, who can offer them contractual security by participating in the scalphunting expedition of John Joel Glanton (*Blood Meridian* 80). Thus, under the text’s new male leader, physical violence acquires validity both as a conduit for monetary profit and as a resource that safeguards the superior status of whiteness. The kid participates in the atrocities of the expedition in ways that transmute masculinized nationalism to econom.

Glanton later demands the indiscriminate killing of both Native Americans and Mexicans so as to garner increasing economic security, thereby commodifying brown bodies for economic gain and qualifying genocidal violence as a licit, if not necessary, enterprise.

Whereas the text initially mobilizes a racialized nationalism through the figure of Captain White, readers encounter, under the guise of John Joel Glanton, a call to monetary opportunism that converges with a more permeable racial hierarchy: Native Americans are racialized others who are slaughtered for the economic gain of Anglo men; Mexicans occupy ambivalent positions (sometimes foes and sometimes allies), while their racial makeup renders them potential recipients of a fate similar to that of their Native American counterparts. Of particular importance for the kid’s own
maturation is the text’s progressive replacement of the imagined community of the nation with a “horizontal comradeship” of “man” in generic, albeit militant, terms (Anderson Imagined Communities 7). By chapter XIII, for example, readers notice an important transition: under the guidance of Captain White, the kid defends the U.S. from Mexicans, whereas under Glanton, he defends Mexicans from Native Americans. Ultimately, and in conjunction with his male peers, he betrays the pledged loyalties that he maintains with the latter, opting to participate in genocidal warfare for monetary profit.

Regardless, survival and economic motives take precedent, as we later learn that the Mexican nationals offer Glanton’s expedition $100 for every Native American scalp (Blood Meridian 79). Readers soon realize that this shared antagonism solidifies the loyalty of Mexicans through a double expediency that benefits both former rivals: the contract assuages the economic precarity of the Anglo men while securing territorial protection for northern Mexicans. The text’s immediate caricature of the landscape recuperates this masculine trajectory, configuring Glanton’s expedition as a catalyst for a harmonious order that had earlier dissipated following the demise of Captain White:

They were about in the morning before daybreak and they caught up and saddled their mounts as soon as it was light enough to see. The jagged mountains were pure blue in the dawn and everywhere birds twittered and the sun when it rose caught the moon in the west so that they lay opposed to each other across the earth, the sun whitehot and the moon a pale replica, as if they were the ends of a common bore beyond whose terminals burned worlds past all reckoning. As the riders came up through the mesquite and pyracantha singlefile in a light lank of
arms and chink of bitrings the sun climbed and the moon set and the horses and the dewsoaked mules commenced to steam in flesh and in shadow. (86)

The sudden shift in leadership provokes no verbal response from the kid. The novel’s representation of space, however, provides readers with important clues. We recall that in the wake of Captain White’s death, the landscape operates as a topography of displacement, configuring the kid as an orphan wandering uncertain terrain devoid of masculine models. Here, though, the narrator presents the region in starkly different terms. Readers notice that once the kid again forms part of a militant Anglo male faction, the landscape reflects a natural, however bleak, order: birds sing at dawn, the men ride in single file, and the sun and moon maintain a parallel harmony.

Much of the same is confirmed in chapter XVIII. Here, the narrator’s description of the terrain foreshadows the ensuing Anglo-Native American confrontation by invoking an archaic historical record of intermittent warfare:

Glanton sat his horse and looked long out upon this scene. Sparse on the mesa the dry weeds lashed in the wind like the earth’s long echo of lance and spear in old encounters forever unrecorded. All the sky seemed troubled and night came quickly over the evening land and small gray birds flew crying softly after the fled sun. He chucked up the horse. He passed and so passed all into the problematical destruction of darkness. (Blood Meridian 105)

The narrator’s use of simile establishes a link between the continuity of these bellicose phenomena and the natural order immanent to the landscape itself. The novel’s consistent preoccupation with order-through-chaos, or “regeneration through violence,” to again use Richard Slotkin’s term (Gunfighter Nation 12), implicates the male characters here as
“communicants” of this order. Understood accordingly, the resulting confrontation provokes no noticeable objection from the kid, whose previous experiences among his militant male counterparts have immunized his gender performance against the shock of wartime carnage:

The kid was lying on his belly holding the big Walker revolver in both hands and letting of the shots slowly and with care as if he’d done it all before in a dream.

The warriors passed within a hundred feet, forty, fifty of them, and went on up the edge of the lake and began to crumble in the serried planes of heat and to break up silently and to vanish. (Blood Meridian 109)

The text confers a sought-after order for the kid as he upholds the violent directives of the profit-focused expedition. By doing so, Blood Meridian absolves the imperatives of any moral orders particular to the sacred spaces rendered obsolete by the excesses of militant masculinity. More importantly, though, the novel explores how the normalization of genocidal violence commodifies brown bodies, in a way that ensures monetary profit for Anglo men while reinforcing the ideology of Anglo-Saxon superiority.

Though the text’s warfare and erasure of holy places configure the mid nineteenth century borderlands as a Darwinist dystopia, the homosocial expedition increasingly operates as a pseudo religion for the young protagonist. Consider, for example, the narrator’s description of Glanton’s men in chapter XI and shortly thereafter in chapter XII:

They were men of another time for all that they bore christian names and they had lived all their lives in a wilderness as had their fathers before them. They’d learnt war by warring, the generations driven from the eastern shore across a continent,
from the ashes at Gnadenhutten onto the prairies and across the outlet to the bloodlands of the west. If much in the world were mystery the limits of that world were not, for it was without measure or bound and there were contained within it creatures more horrible yet and men of other colors and beings which no man has looked upon and yet not alien none of it more than were their own hearts alien in them. (*Blood Meridian* 138)

For although each man among them was discrete unto himself, conjoined they made a thing that had not been before and in that communal soul were wastes hardly reckonable more than those whited regions on old maps where monsters do live and where there is nothing other of the known world save conjectural winds. (152)

The alert reader notices that the text’s continued use of Biblical imagery and polysyndetic prose configure these male actors as part and parcel of an archaic male trajectory. Readers do not know their histories, personal motivations, or even the workings of their individual psychologies, but the text puts into relief these ambiguities by subsuming the men into a westward moving homosocial collective. As the only cipher of history, the narrator surveys the workings of the present expedition by positing its precursor in the Battle of Gnadenhutten and its origins in an endless father-son trajectory of learned warfare. In fact, the narrator assures us that the most alien feature of the landscape is not the presence of non-Anglos, as we might expect, but rather the absence of any moral code—"their own hearts [were] alien in them," we read (138), later learning that "in that communal soul were wastes hardly reckonable" (152). This juxtaposition of the
landscape as an amoral haven alongside the violent undertakings of the Glanton expedition configures the borderlands as an idyllic arena for the successful completion of contractual genocide. By representing the region, the male characters, and their collective trajectory in such terms, the text assures readers that the kid’s participation here recuperates any previous loss of masculine standing incurred both at the initial breach between negligent father and destitute son and later following the death of Captain White.

While the biblical parallels remain constant, the text’s representations of violence particular to each individual male leader do not. Captain White invokes damming nationalistic discourse to justify U.S. intervention in Mexico. John Joel Glanton, on the other hand, mobilizes racialized violence as a way to counter his group’s economic precarity. The commodification of brown bodies here directly converges with the text’s growing preoccupation with manhood as survival strategy and capital accumulation. When Glanton’s expedition meets a group of squatters, we learn that the latter have been unable to extract any profitable material from the barren earth: “They were foul and ragged and half crazed. They’d been making forays at night up the arroyo for wood and water and they had been feeding off a dead mule that lay gutted and stinking in the far corner of the yard. The first thing they asked for was whiskey and the next was tobacco” (Blood Meridian 114). Soon after, the men decide to join Glanton’s expedition, strongly suggesting what readers have already gleaned from the actions of the kid: whether in the “bloodlands of the west” (138) or along the borderlands where “death seemed the most prevalent feature of the landscape” (48), genocidal violence becomes normative by ensuring personal profit and reinforcing racial hierarchies.

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It is helpful to recall that just as the novel represents the landscape as bereft of any moral code, it also configures it as a region devoid of any profitable minerals. In sharp contrast, the scalps of Native Americans ensure “full payment in gold” (Blood Meridian 167).
This accommodation of both necessity and surplus rationalizes the Anglo males’ use of physical violence by bolstering an already prevailing economy of whiteness.¹²⁹ Such would explain the text’s representation of the expedition’s undertakings as procedural rather than appalling: “The men were stringing up scalps on strips of leather whang and some of the dead lay with broad slices of hide cut from their backs to be used for the making of belts and harness. The dead Mexican McGill [the expedition’s guide] had been scalped and the bloody skulls were already blackening in the sun” (Blood Meridian 159). Indeed, the novel’s clinical assessment of these events establishes an uncomfortable tension by configuring them as a series of business undertakings rather than a list of wartime atrocities. Just as the narrative’s profanation of holy spaces prefigures the actions of Captain White, the commodification of brown bodies here prefigures a trajectory for Glanton’s men that desacralizes non-white bodies as exchangeable commodities. We are shocked to later learn that the scalps of both Mexicans and Native Americans are used to garner profit, while brown skin itself is used to supplement the Anglos’ attire.

The kid himself largely upholds these acts. In chapter XIII, for instance, he provokes conflict once again after becoming frustrated with Spanish-English language barriers. Addressing the surrounding Mexicans in a “wretched Spanish” (Blood Meridian 178) and believing them to have insulted his Anglo companions, the kid initiates a fight that eventually embroils all men present. Here, violence allows the young protagonist to

¹²⁹ Though physical violence, under Glanton’s leadership, is associated with economic motives, whiteness remains an indication of privilege. In chapter XVI, for example, Glanton and his men encounter a deranged vagrant of German origins. In response to this white man’s state of affairs, Glanton publically laments, “I dont like to see white men that way ... Dutch or whatever. I dont like to see it” (Blood Meridian 226).
compensate for this supposed verbal assault, and shortly thereafter, it allows all these same men to secure economic profit:

The judge stepped back from the doorway into the cantina where the Americans stood looking at each other and at the bodies in a sort of wonder. They looked at Glanton. His eyes cut across the smoking room. His hat lying on a table. He stepped over and got it and set it on his head and squared it. He looked about. The men were reloading the empty chamber in their pistols. Hair, boys, he said. The string aint run on this trade yet. (180)

Careful readers will notice that the kid’s actions anticipate an important turn in the tenuous relationship between the Anglo men and their Mexican contractors, and because of his intervention, the text brings Anglo opportunism to its most appalling conclusion. Bound by economic necessity and the bonds of white fraternalism, Glanton and his men rescind their loyalties to the Mexican nationals by slaughtering innocent Mexican citizens and claiming their scalps to be of Native American origin. Soon thereafter, we read that several Mexicans “had been running toward the church where they knelt clutching the altar and from this refuge they were dragged howling one by one and one by one they were slain and scalped in the chancel floor” (181). Whereas racial antagonisms had previously cohered an imagined fraternity under Captain White, here they curtail the economic precarity of the Anglo men present. The events here culminate in an alarming revelation that the kid’s militant masculinity makes possible: the commodification of brown bodies assuages the anxieties of the male collective, normalizes genocidal warfare, and configures survival itself as a marker of manhood.\footnote{This is not to say that the underpinnings of nationalism do not condition the outlook of Glanton’s expedition. In fact, the narrator assures us only thirteen pages later in chapter XIV that Glanton “cut down
When the Anglo men return to the village of their Mexican contractors, they are met with revelry in spite of “reeking with the blood of the citizenry for whose protection they had contracted” (Blood Meridian 185). This dramatic irony conceals from the Mexican nationals the nefarious workings of Glanton’s expedition, and only in the following sentence do we learn that “[w]ithin a week of [the expedition’s] quitting the city there would be a price of eight thousand pesos posted for Glanton’s head” (185). The reticence to divulge any moral qualms or following this exchange suggests that the violent operations described earlier subtend the masculine script of the homosocial collective. In fact, the only revelation that the narrator provides emerges from a description of the landscape, suggesting that what readers would regard as a series of moral transgressions has only conditioned the men for similar violent undertakings in the future: “they rode infatuate and half fond toward the red demise of that day, toward the evening lands and the distant pandemonium of the sun” (185). As readers progress in the text, they become more and more aware of the judge’s role as a hegemonic authority who not only surpasses his two predecessors in questions of authority, but also exceeds them in terms of his management of violence. This chapter proposes that Judge Holden operates as the text’s ultimate masculine model through an explicit acknowledgement of his role as a would-be father to the father-seeking kid and that he uses physical and epistemic violence in order to safeguard his position as hegemonic authority and to preclude any deviation from this masculine script.

V.C. Judge Holden: Physical and Epistemic Violence as Markers of Hegemonic Masculinity

the Mexican flag with his knife and tied it to the tail of a mule. The he mounted the mule and goaded it through the square dragging the sacred bandera [flag] in the mud behind him” (Blood Meridian 193).
In his memoir *My Confession*, written sometime between 1855 and 1861,\textsuperscript{131} Samuel Chamberlain writes of Judge Holden accordingly: “His desires was blood and women, and terrible stories were circulated in camp of horrid crimes committed by him when bearing another name, in the Cherokee nation and Texas” (271). What are readers to make of Judge Holden in *Blood Meridian*? Harold Bloom, for one, identifies him as “the most frightening figure in all of American literature” (“Introduction” vi) while John Emil Sepich suggests that he exists as a Western incarnation of war itself (“The Dance of History” 23).\textsuperscript{132} Such comments, however conjectural, are not entirely without merit. More so than any other figure in the novel, Judge Holden defies readers’ attempts to categorize his motivations. Indeed, neither readers nor the characters themselves are able to posit his origins, personal background, or the specifics of his future trajectory.

We do, however, read that he is a massive albino figure, over six feet tall and completely hairless. He speaks English, Spanish, Dutch, and German, can quote “Coke and Blackstone, Anaximander, [and] Thales” (*Blood Meridian* 239), and he frequently frames his encyclopedic knowledge of world history through abstruse homilies that often leave readers and characters alike confused about the intent of his musings. Holden does not seem to age, nor does he appear to need basic necessities (such as water or a horse), preferring instead to carry his rifle, a bag, “a brace of pistols and a good assortment of specie, gold and silver” (125). He is also a formidably amoral individual, participating in

\textsuperscript{131} In his introductory essay to the 1956 published version of *My Confession*, Roger Butterfield writes, “Apparently the manuscript was all written between the years 1855 and 1861, when Chamberlain went off again to fight in the Civil War. It remained in the possession of his family until the 1940s when it turned up in an antique shop in Connecticut” (“Introduction” 2).

\textsuperscript{132} Vince Brewton also argues the following: “Judge Holden figures as the living embodiment of an oracle and ontology of war” (“The Changing Landscape of Violence in Cormac McCarthy’s Early Novels and Border Trilogy” 131). This strongly corresponds to the insights of historian Robert Young, who, in his study *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, affirms that war “is another form of the appropriation of the other, and underpins all ontological thinking with its violence ... the implicit violence of ontology itself” (13)
a number of atrocities that might explain why past critics have qualified the novel’s violence as “outlandish,” (Wallach “From Beowulf to Blood Meridian 199), “mindless” (Lincoln Cormac McCarthy 83), and “senseless” (Woodward “Cormac McCarthy’s Venomous Fiction”): the narrator implies in chapter IX that the judge rapes and then murders a “halfbreed boy” (Blood Meridian 119); in chapter XII, Holden plays with an Apache child, if only to later kill and scalp him (164); and in chapter XIV, he buys two puppies and then drowns them shortly thereafter for no apparent reason (192). He frequently disappears and reappears throughout the novel as well, creating a number of lacunae that compel readers to question why these absences transpire at all. In spite of the ambiguities that shroud the judge, his role in the novel becomes clear when paired alongside the kid’s maturation.

The contention of this case study has been that, in Blood Meridian, both mimesis and abjection shape Anglo hegemonic masculinities that necessitate physical violence against women and borderland characters of color. In addition, this study has proposed that compulsory masculine scripts emerge alongside three male archetypes, whose violent directives the kid either affirms or resists in tandem with the compulsions to establish himself within a father-son conjecture. No such masculine code, however, can be assessed without a detailed analysis of the character of Judge Holden, who not only endorses genocidal violence as did his predecessor, but also extends Anglo male hegemony in the borderlands through epistemic violence.134

133 When examined alongside the judge’s musings concerning morality, though, such events are more easily understood, shocking though they may be. In chapter XVII, for example, the judge affirms, “Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak. Historical law subverts it at every turn. A moral view can never be proven right or wrong by any ultimate test” (Blood Meridian 250).
134 Sepich writes, “While McCarthy’s character John Glanton is mentioned with some consistency in many stories of the Southwest, Judge Holden’s named historical existence rests solely on information provided by
Since the publication of *Blood Meridian*, an impressive number of critics have sought to better understand the character of Judge Holden. In his article concerning the representation of evil in *Blood Meridian*, Timothy Parrish remarks that while Judge Holden is “the most violent character in American literature, [he] is also the most learned and civilized. The scalphunters are hired to kill Indians by the agents of civilization” (“History and the Problem of Evil” 71). Still, we must ask, like the kid himself does in chapter X, “What is he a judge of?” (*Blood Meridian* 135). The characters never say, and McCarthy never tells. Just as the novel itself interrogates the “black and white truths of American exceptionalism,” to again use Dudley’s phrase (“McCarthy’s Heroes” 183), the judge never reveals his true nature by issuing black-and-white verdicts. Instead, Holden presents himself first as a sort of aid to Glanton, and only later does he function as the model upon whom the masculine norm for the men is conditioned. Critic Dianne Luce affirms a similar position, arguing that “[a]ll Holden’s acts and utterances are calculated to cozen any man he does not outright kill ... Holden usurps all judgment, confounding or silencing all opposition in his mock dialogues with the men” (“Ambiguities, Dilemmas, and Double Binds” 24-5). With regards to Judge Holden’s penchant for physical violence, Sara Spurgeon’s comments configure his actions in a masculinist scope, remarking that Holden functions as the “expression of white American civilization, or perhaps the brutal force of its will” (“The Sacred Hunter” 84). Spurgeon elaborates:

Samuel Chamberlain’s *My Confession*, the only personal narrative written by a member of Glanton’s gang” (14). McCarthy’s description of Judge Holden shares strong similarities with Chamberlain’s account. According to the latter, Judge Holden is “the best educated man in northern Mexico” and is “a man of gigantic size” who “stood six feet six in his moccasins, had a large fleshy frame, a dull tallow colored face destitute of hair and all expression” (271). For more information about the historical figure of Judge Holden, consult chapter 2 of *Notes on Blood Meridian*, and chapters XLI and XLII of Chamberlain’s *My Confession*.
[Judge Holden] carries his war forward from both sides, existing at once as the ultimate expression of Euro-American manhood (poet/scholar/warrior) and as the primitive savage he seeks to destroy and emulate, donning native clothing and defeating native peoples on their own ground. And more importantly ... the judge is the agent of the revelation of the savagery at the heart of the myths and the civilization that produces them. (84)\(^\text{135}\)

The judge might best be understood as an embodiment of all of the foregoing ideas, but in order to analyze how he can so effectively structure the lives of the men around him, and why the kid initially affirms but later transgresses his directives, the present study contends that he must also be understood as an embodiment of an Anglo hegemonic masculinity, the effects of which are most discernible in the men who treat him jointly as both savior and masculine ideal.

More so than any other character, the judge is able to structure the actions of his followers with ease.\(^\text{136}\) The novel’s ex-priest even speaks of the judge in salvific language, claiming that “[h]e saved us all” (*Blood Meridian* 124), if only to later add that Glanton’s men “circl[ed] past [the judge] like communicants” (134). This laudatory treatment of the judge should come as little surprise. In chapter XI, the narrator informs readers that the landscape of *Blood Meridian* possesses “scarcely any waysigns in that part of the world” (144), thereby setting the stage for Holden’s undisputed claim to power. In his discussion of the judge’s philosophical background, Timothy Parrish takes

\(^{135}\) Critic Neil Campbell echoes a similar argument by writing that the judge “challenges and interrogates received rules, values and myths, allowing McCarthy to comment on the way in which recorded history is a process of selection and control, whilst providing a fictional landscape for acts of imperialism and conquest so often omitted from these historical stories” (“Liberty Beyond Its Proper Bounds” 218).

\(^{136}\)Connell argues that gender is “a way in which social practice is ordered,” a construct that “exists precisely to the extent that biology does not determine the social” and as a framework that “constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do” (*Masculinities* 71).
note of a similar phenomenon, affirming that he “gives [his men] their life and their power to kill others” (“The First and Last Book of America” 103). McCarthy’s continued use of religious language further underscores the judge’s position as both savior and masculine model while also signaling his followers’ willingness to honor his directives as communicants of a new order. As much is confirmed when we read that, soon after meeting the judge, the men follow their new leader “like the disciples of a new faith” (*Blood Meridian* 130). The Judge’s violent Great Commission soon follows.\(^{137}\)

Just as the novel calls our attention to the nebulous origins of the kid in chapter I, it also emphasizes the equally mysterious beginnings of the judge. Speaking to the kid, Tobin describes his first encounter with the judge in terms bordering on the supernatural:

Then about the meridian of that day we come upon the judge on his rock there in that wilderness by his single self. Aye and there was no rock, just the one ... He had with him that selfsame rifle you see with him now ... [and] in latin: *Et In Arcadia Ego*. A reference the lethal in it. Common enough for a man to name his gun. I’ve heard Sweetlips and Hark From The Tombs and every sort of lady’s name. His is the first and only ever I seen with an inscription from the classics.

And there he set ... Like he’d been expectin us. (*Blood Meridian* 125)

Having established a “secret commerce ... [s]ome terrible covenant,” Glanton and the judge then ride “side by side and soon they was conversin like brothers” (126).\(^{138}\) With his nebulous origins, encyclopedic knowledge of the world at large, and indiscriminate

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\(^{137}\) The judge’s mountain homily parallels the scene in the Gospel of St. Matthew, where Christ, also on a mountain, issues to His disciples the Great Commission: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (28: 18-20).

\(^{138}\) Later, the narrator notes that Glanton himself watches the judge as if he’d “had his wits stole,” and that shortly thereafter, the judge rode at the head of the expedition “with Glanton bringing up the rear” (*Blood Meridian* 160).
slaughter of non-whites, the judge exhibits both the “manly autonomy” of nineteenth century American manhood and the scientific rationalism that bolstered its attendant racial hierarchies.

In addition to the use of religious language, McCarthy includes a host of Judeo-Christian structures (Holden as demon or malevolent god, the kid as Christ or disciple). This process ironizes Christian morality, but it also affirms the inefficacy of *imitatio Christi* in the nineteenth-century borderlands. Oddly, though, the philosophical musings in which Judge Holden relays his orders share close affinities with Biblical parables in spite of the former’s complexity and Nietzschean underpinnings. Men, he reveals, love games, but more importantly, they are prone to returning to the “ruins wondered at by tribes of savages” (*Blood Meridian* 147). The judge’s infrequent recourse to pre-modern man implicates his disciples within an archaic trajectory of learned warfare. Time and time again, the judge lauds intermittent male-enacted violence as a prescription for social order, with no empathy extended for those who suffer the brunt of its operations. Consider, briefly, the judge’s inquiries in chapter XI after discovering ancient rock painting of warring men:

And is the race of man not more predacious yet? The way of the world is to bloom and to flower and die but in the affairs of men there is no waning and the noon of his expression signals the onset of night. His spirit is exhausted at the

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139 While critics have argued that *Blood Meridian* is best understood as an anti-Western (Kollin “Genre and the Geographies of Violence” 461-62) or a revisionary Western (Jarrett Cormac McCarthy 69-74), the text’s rejection of *imitatio Christi* speaks to the observations of Jane Tompkins, who contends in her book *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* that it is “[n]ot *imitatio Christi* but *imitatio naturae*” that dominates westerns (72), and that “[t]he rhetoric of the landscape works in favor of the particular masculine idea that Westerns enforce” (77).

140 Several critics including Phillips (“History and the Ugly Facts” 442), Fielder (“Historical Representation and the Scriptural Economy of Imperialism” 32), and Donoghue (“Reading *Blood Meridian*” 411) have observed the Nietzschean undertones of Judge Holden’s actions and philosophical speeches.
peak of its achievement. His meridian is at once his darkening and the evening of his day. He loves games? Let him play for stakes. This you see here, these ruins wondered at by tribes of savages, do you not think that this will be again? Aye.

And again. With other people, with other sons. (146-7).

Similar to the historical continuity between father and child established in chapter one, the emphasis on a recurrent trajectory involving “other people” and “other sons” begs the question of how men have always affirmed their masculinities through a violence that experiences “no waning” (146). Perhaps “[t]he way of the world” is indeed “to bloom ... and die,” but the judge leaves no doubt that men are different, caught in a sort of dance that beseeches repetition.

In chapter XVII, for example, the judge continues his metaphorical allusion to war-as-learned-game by revealing that men are made for such undertakings, all of which “aspire to the condition of war for here that which is wagered swallows up game, player, all” (Blood Meridian 249). Holden’s musings become less complex when considered in conjunction with how and why men are implicated in such processes. Years after the kid flees from the judge in the desert, the latter offers one last homily to the kid-now-turned-man. In so doing, he extends his admiration for warfare, “the ultimate game” as he himself terms it, by elucidating how it binds men in a contest of power:

The selection of one man over another is a preference absolute and irrevocable and it is a dull man indeed who could reckon so profound a decision without agency or significance either one ...This man holding this particular arrangement of cards in his hand is thereby removed from existence. This is the nature of war, whose stake is at once the game and the authority and the justification. Seen so,
war is the truest form of divination. It is the testing of one’s will and the will of another within that larger will which because it binds them is therefore forced to select. War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god. (249)

Only here are readers able to understand the judge’s “dance” as a metaphorical allusion to the workings of war. Holden’s homilies rationalize warfare as a masculine praxis for the regeneration of order through an enduring primitive chaos. The characterization of war in such terms bring to mind the insights of journalist and activist Chris Hedges, who argues, “Many young men, schooled in the notion that war is the ultimate definition of manhood” come to understood “that only in war will they be tested and proven [so that] that they can discover their worth as human beings in battle” (War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning 84). Hedges comments merit extended citation for their accurate association of acts of war with masculine performance:

War makes the world understandable, a black and white tableau of them and us. It suspends thought, especially self-critical thought. All bow before the supreme effort ... Most of us willingly accept war as long as we can fold it into a belief system that paints the ensuing suffering as necessary for a higher good ... But war is a god, as the ancient Greeks and Romans knew ... We urge young men to war, making the slaughter they are asked to carry out a rite of passage. And this rite has changed little over the centuries, centuries in which there has almost continuously been a war raging somewhere on the planet. (10)

Blood Meridian’s male characters uphold this longstanding militant tradition in a land devoid of any transcendental moral order or authoritative deity. By extolling warfare
accordingly, the judge assures the perpetuation of a militant masculinity that operates, by necessity, as a hallmark of nation building, in which he himself remains a complicit actor, if not a chief architect. Still, *Blood Meridian* does not restrict its representation of male-enacted violence in purely physical terms.

Nearing its halfway mark, the text makes an important shift in its representation of violence. Rather than continue its thematic preoccupation with warfare and the economic profitability of commodified brown bodies, the text configures the judge as an annalist, thereby extending his authority to epistemic terrain. Readers are never given an explanation as to why the judge archives these disparate artifacts accordingly. In fact, when met with an inquiry concerning his notes, we read only that “it was [the judge’s] intention to expunge them from the memory of man” (*Blood Meridian* 140). The narrator elaborates:

The judge all day had made small forays among the rocks of the gorge through which they’d passed and now at the fire he spread part of a wagonsheet on the ground and was sorting out his finds and arranging them before him. In his lap he held the leather ledgerbook and he took up each piece, flint or potsherd or tool of bone, and deftly sketched it into the book. He sketched with a practiced ease and there was no wrinkling of that bald brow or pursing of those oddly childish lips. His fingers traced the impression of old willow wicker on a piece of pottery clay and he put this into his book with nice shadings, an economy of pencil strokes. He is a draftsman as he is other things, well sufficient to the task. He looks up from time to time at the fire or at his companions in arms or at the night beyond. Lastly he set before him the footpiece from a suit of armor hammered out
in a shop in Toledo three centuries before, a small steel tapadero frail and shelled with rot. This the judge sketched in profile and in perspective, citing the dimensions in his neat script, making marginal notes. Glanton watched him. When he had done he took up the little footguard and turned it in his hand and studied it again and then he crushed it into a ball of foil and pitched it into the fire. He fathered up the other artifacts and cast them also into the fire and he shook out the wagonsheet and folded it away among his possibles together with the notebook. The he sat with his hands cupped in his lap and he seemed much satisfied with the world, as if his counsel had been sought at its creation. (140)

It is only later, after Holden assumes a hegemonic position over the male collective, that readers are able to understand his actions here as markers of epistemic violence, thereby foreshadowing his rise to authority by configuring him as the sole of author the historical record. This concerted effort to eliminate the cultural artifacts of preexisting civilizations assures readers that Holden’s power will remain uncontested, and that any attempt to offset its primacy will entail dire consequences, as the kid himself experiences at the novel’s conclusion. These implicit warnings acquire increasing validity in the pages shortly thereafter. In a scene that parallels Christ’s own invocation of parables, the judge recounts a story to the other men present regarding sons and fathers. Just as the novel’s initial scenes foreground a father-son trajectory, the conclusion of the judge’s story makes similar affirmations: “All his life he [the son] carries before him the idol of a perfection to which he can never attain ... The world which he inherits bears him false witness. He is broken before a frozen god and he will never find his way. What is true of one man, said the judge, is true of many” (145-46). Here, readers and characters alike
encounter confusion at the judge’s musings, and only much later are we then able to recall these events as clever harbingers for the novel’s climactic encounter, which pits the judge as a would-be father against a now-grown “kid”.

If, in fact, the judge does embody the masculine ethos of Manifest Destiny, his violent actions should also be understood as reflections of epistemic hegemony, or as the judge himself affirms, “Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent” (*Blood Meridian* 198). Consider, for example, the judge’s actions in chapter XIII:

The rocks about in every sheltered place were covered with ancient paintings and the judge was soon among them copying out those certain ones into this book to take away with him. They were of men and animals and of the chase and there were curious birds and arcane maps and there were constructions of such singular vision as to justify every fear of man and the things that are in him ... In three days they would fall upon a band of peaceful Tiguas camped on the river and slaughtered them every soul ... As if such destinies were prefigured in the very rock for those with eyes to read. No man stood to tender them a defense. (173)

Here, too, the text invokes a historical continuity in tandem with an alleged all-male trajectory. The judge, again, is the only cipher of these artifacts, and while the narrator never renders in explicit terms what conclusions the judge himself draws, the events that transpire shortly thereafter configure male-enacted warfare as a variable that crosscuts societies across time and space, providing the most powerful of its male practitioners with an order that might otherwise evade them altogether. In fact, time and time again,
Blood Meridian draws parallels to archaic societies either through the narrator’s assurances or the judge’s homilies.

The judge’s attempts to archive human knowledge and natural phenomena forces readers to grapple with the questions of how, by whom, and by means of what omissions does history come to exist. While it is true that the judge demands the violent elimination of colored borderland characters, he also undertakes a project that secures epistemic hegemony since it is only he who enjoys authorship of the historical record. Even so, the judge simultaneously acknowledges the limits of this project: “Even in this world more things exist without our knowledge than with it and the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way” (Blood Meridian 245). Perhaps the limitations of human knowledge are beside the point: if Anglo men, like Judge Holden, conquer the west, build the nation, and transgress its borders, it is men, like Holden, who will also write its history.

VI. Women, Abjection, and Feminine Charity in Blood Meridian

Readers will recall that in Caballero, the female characters play a foundational role in the establishment of an idealized hybrid community--one that ultimately extols a political economy of whiteness by giving primacy to Anglo entrepreneurialism and a heteronormative script of feminine domesticity. In spite of these gendered restrictions and the superiority of capitalist Anglo masculinity, the female characters are able to exercise an interstitial agency by offsetting the patriarchal claims of one cultural order, even if they must acclimate to the domestic logic of another (male visibility / female domesticity). The female characters in Caballero undergo a dramatic evolution that ultimately dissolves an atavistic gender code, rooted in notions of family honor, that had
relegated the novel’s women to peripheral roles. Don Santiago’s daughters question the legitimacy of hacienda patriarchy, leave the hacienda, and upset the trajectory of Mexican patrilineage by marrying Anglo outsiders. The women’s roles in both *Caballero* and *Blood Meridian* are fundamental, but how they are represented varies greatly.

The narrative tensions that permeate *Blood Meridian* often stem from the actions of its male characters, with many constructing their masculine identities in contrast to a real or perceived specter of abjected femininity. How, though, does the kid nuance this process? This section examines the role of female characters in *Blood Meridian* and proposes that in spite of his maturation, emulation of male models, and performance of violent masculine scripts, the kid ultimately embodies this same abjected femininity by virtue of his charitable concessions to both his peers and non-white borderland characters. By doing so, the kid operates as one of the few figures who counters the dominant male script of his violent male leaders—a process that configures him as a deviant to the male collective.

With the importance of the text’s initial prophetic assurance in mind, readers should recall the scene in chapter VII, where a Mexican gypsy purports to detect in the kid an alarming (though ultimately unrevealed) fate: “El hombre ... she said. El hombre más joven. El muchacho,” and later adding, “La carroza, la carroza ... Invertido. Carta de guerra, de venganza. La ví sin ruedas sobre un río oscuro ... Perdida, perdida. La carta está perdida en la noche ... Un maleficio ... Qué viento tan maleante .... Carroza de muertos, llena de huesos. El joven qué ...” (*Blood Meridian* 94, 96). A frustrated Glanton intercedes, ending the woman’s fragmented musings and trying to kill her before the judge ultimately rescues her. The narrator’s description of the latter supplements this
folkloric rendering of a promised father-son fate by casting the judge (a would-be-father, as the narrative eventually configures him) in malevolent terms as “a great ponderous djinn [who] stepped through the fire and the flames delivered him up as if he were in some way native to their element” (94). The narrator’s description of the judge as somehow “native” to fire and flame further qualify him as an inverted God-the-Father. Additionally, the text’s problematic configuration regarding the limits of personal agency forces readers to more carefully contemplate the kid’s maturation in light of his male models. Consider, for example, the narrator’s description of the campfire following this encounter: “the ragged flames fled down the wind as if sucked by some maelstrom out there in the void, some vortex in that waste apposite to which man’s transit and his reckonings alike lay abrogate. As if beyond will or fate he and his beats and his trappings moved both in card in substance under consignment to some third and other destiny” (96). The text, of course, never specifies who consigns such a destiny (the “sleeping God of the Mexicans” is now wholly absent), but the ambiguity implies that the kid’s claims to agency emerge from within a male hierarchy, and the judge’s malevolent characterization foreshadows a confrontation that readers only encounter in the novel’s concluding scenes.

Perhaps because of the ubiquity of the male characters’ presence, readers might miss the fact that the first person scalped by John Joel Glanton’s expedition is, in fact, a woman (Blood Meridian 98-99). This gender dichotomy extends to symbolic terrain as well. In chapter XII, Glanton and his men find the bodies of Anglo men slain at the hands of Native Americans: “Some of their beards were men but yet wore strange menstrual wounds between their legs and no man’s parts for these had been cut away and hung dark
and strange from out their grinning mouths” (153). The narrator assures readers that one of the most humiliating acts of war manifests itself in gendered terms. The text’s nuanced attention to masculine presence and feminine absence against the backdrop of territorial conquest does not ignore the historical record.

As David Pugh explains in his book *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America*, nineteenth century men, westward moving or otherwise, typically contrasted manliness with luxury, dependency, and inaction, and as such “envisioned their nation and the land as feminine, which is to say, something to be revered by men but also something to be defeated and controlled by them as a means of expressing their maleness, their autonomy, by contrast” (xvii). Though the novel differs from traditional Westerns by countering American exceptionalism through its exploration of imperialism and violence, the novel nonetheless interrogates, whereas traditional westerns might merely reflect, what scholar Jane Tompkins identifies as an “ethical system” which “vindicates conflict, violence, and vengeance, and the social and political hierarchy it creates, putting adult white males on top with everyone else in descending order beneath” (*West of Everything* 73). Though female characters do not configure prominently into McCarthy’s novels, their limited presence has not evaded the attention of past critics. In his article “Female Presence, Male Violence, and the Art of Artlessness in the Border Trilogy,” Patrick W. Shaw makes comments that prove equally valid in our approach to *Blood Meridian*: “The girls and women,” Shaw argues, “do not emerge from the androcentric narratives with attributes enough to define them as distinct personae ... Often the females are not granted names, thus losing conventional and convenient nominal tags and traveling through the text with pronominal anonymity” (“Female
Presence, Male Violence” 258). Indeed, in one of the first scenes where women are mentioned at all, a former slave owner informs the kid that there are “four things that can destroy the earth ... [w]omen, whisky, money and niggers” (Blood Meridian 18), thus instructing the young protagonist about the prudence of men’s erasure of women.

Drawing off the insights of Tompkins, Susan Kollin postulates that McCarthy “may ... have erased the presence of women in order to argue a case about the place of Anglo masculinity in nation-building” (“Genre and the Geographies of Violence” 569). These observations force readers to question how McCarthy represents his male characters in a gendered scope, and in particular how the malleable protagonist constructs his masculine persona against the backdrop of three distinct male archetypes. In spite of the male characters’ regional differences, readers would be wise to question in general terms what masculine figure constructed the nation.

In his study Manhood in America, sociologist Michael Kimmel identifies the so-called “Self Made Man” as the figure who “built America” (Manhood in America 139). Kimmel contends that during the nineteenth century, “the emerging working class [on the east coast] supported women’s complete exclusion from the public sphere” (143). Along these lines, David Pugh maintains that many nineteenth century men viewed women and femininity as civilizing constraints on one’s masculinity: “because women were identified with civilization as a means of containing or neutralizing them, men could see only too well where the threat to their masculinity lay” (Sons of Liberty 61). The novel

\[141\] Kimmel argues that the earliest American masculinities opposed themselves to British and aristocratic conceptions of manhood. This would later herald, especially in the nineteenth century, autonomy as an indicator of being a “self-made man.” Kimmel also argues that this understanding of masculinity also helped justify the westward expansion of the United States (Manhood in America 139). David Pugh makes similar observations: “The cult of the self-made man and the philosophy of laissez-faire gave them the license they needed and, social Darwinists to the core, they confiscated huge chunks of land, built great machines and factories, fixed prices via secret alliances, and formed their empires with oil, coal, and steel” (Sons of Liberty xix).
does not stray far from representing women accordingly as constricting figures. In chapter XV, for example, the narrator describes a kid from a prominent Kentucky family, who “like many another young man of his class [had] gone west because of a woman” (*Blood Meridian* 207). This is not to say that the novel merely configures women as invisible domestic specters. In fact, when women are visible at all, they are consistently profiled as ancillary devices for the perpetuation of a hegemonic masculine framework—that is, as spectators of male violence (the observant “dames of the city” 72), recipients of sexual violence (John Joel Glanton’s sex slave 263), objectified performers (the San Diego barroom stripper 327), or charitable patrons (the tavernkeeper’s wife 4, the food-bearing Mexican women 71). Thus, in spite of their variegated roles and distinct geographical positionings, the novel’s women share a sparseness of presence and a bereftness of personal agency that fortify the novel’s gender dichotomy by robbing them collectively of both voice and public visibility. Though the three archetypes studied here configure women as little more than mute observers or sexual devices, their presence (when they appear at all) allows the kid to interrogate the legitimacy of the gender codes that structure the social fabric particular to these three male leaders.

In chapter V, for example, after Mexican nationals defeat Captain White’s group, they capture the kid and bring him to Mexico. In contrast to this glorification of the male nation-building role, the Mexican women exhibit a charity that opposes the male-endorsed violence described earlier. Soon after the kid arrives at his Mexican captors’ lodging, a woman brings him and his fellow captives food: “she smiled at them and she had smuggled them sweets under her shawl and there were pieces of meat at the bottom of the bowls that had come from her own table” (*Blood Meridian* 71). The alert reader
notices that such acts of selflessness counterpoise the opportunism and profit motives of the novel’s Anglo men. More importantly, though, these actions share parallels with the kid’s own indiscriminate acts of charity. In chapter XII, only the kid shows clemency toward Brown (162), who struggles to remove an arrow from his leg, while the other men, in contrast, appear to be motivated solely by the necessity of survival and the promise of economic gain. By acting accordingly, the kid ruptures the line of profit-survival motive, rendering him suspect and thus garnering the criticism of the expriest. Later, in chapter XV, the kid willingly offers water to another young white male, who had tried to kill him only moments before (208); and shortly thereafter, in the same chapter, only the kid volunteers to help the judge kill a horse so that the male collective can eat it and avoid starvation (219). These sporadic acts of selflessness strongly contrast the kid’s “taste for mindless violence” (3) described by the narrator in the text’s opening chapter. In fact, when the kid is separated from Glanton’s expedition in chapter XV, the narrator informs readers that when the kid does kill another man, as he does in the case of an approaching stranger, he does so in self-defense, and that rather than take pride in his actions, he instead “turned to run” (211). Ultimately, these episodes offset the protagonist’s masculine investment in Glanton’s genocidal enterprise, rendering him suspect, as the narrator suggests, once the protagonist reunites with the male collective: “Glanton’s eyes in their dark sockets were burning centroids of murder and he and his haggard riders stared balefully at the kid as if he were no part of them for all they were so like in wretchedness of circumstance” (218). These acts of charity and clemency problematize the initial configuration of the kid as inherently violent, while
simultaneously configuring these actions as decidedly feminine (and therefore disdainful) characteristics.

In contrast to the men who act as nation building and defending agents in the public sphere, the women in Blood Meridian are relegated to peripheral roles that either compromise their dignity or negate their individuality altogether. A Kentucky veteran anecdotally recalls women as “the dames of the city,” who, during his own war experiences, “rode up into the hills in buggies and picknicked and watched the battle” (Blood Meridian 72). The role of the women here reinforces their positions as mute spectators, prefacing the text’s later configuration of them in their much more degraded roles as victims of sexualized violence. In chapter XIX, for example, we encounter the gang’s horde of (colored) sexual prisoners: “There were also detained in their camp a dozen or more Indian and Mexican girls, some little more than children. Glanton supervised with some interest the raising of the walls about him but otherwise left his men to pursue the business at the crossing with a terrible latitude” (263). Rather than function as mechanisms that enhance the reputation of their male counterparts, the female characters in Blood Meridian are often reduced to mere sexual objects. In fact, the narrator’s comments on northern Mexican communities in chapter XIII affirms that whereas the presence of Glanton’s men might have assured protection from Native Americans, their continued presence in the Mexican community results in sexual war crimes rather than long-term security: “These people had seen Americans in plenty, dusty laggard trains of them months out of their own country and half crazed with the enormity of their own presence in that immense and bloodslaked waste, commandeering meal and meat or indulging a latent taste for rape among the sloe-eyed girls of that country” (177).
Though the male characters never showcase any moral objections, readers are shocked to encounter the abjection of women in such normative terms. In chapter XIX, for example, we learn that a female Mexican captive serves as a sex slave for Glanton: “[a] young Mexican girl was crouched naked [and] watched [Glanton] ride past, covering her breasts with her hands. She wore a rawhide collar about her neck and she was chained to a post and there was a clay bowl of blackened meatscraps beside her” (272). The text’s noticeable absence of moral qualifiers naturalizes the girl’s degradation within the text’s overarching sexual order. McCarthy’s clever invocation of “blackened meatscraps” here contrasts the “pieces of meat” described earlier by the charitable Mexican female patron (272, 71). This parallel counterpoises charitable actions (decidedly feminine) against militant masculinities that demands violence. By representing the female characters as victims of sexual violence, the novel simultaneously posits gender as a factor as relevant as race in the determination of who will serve as a victim to, and for the continuation of, a given hegemonic masculine script. Of particular importance for this study is how the kid’s charitable actions problematize his masculine standing by establishing a continuity between himself and the text’s denigrated women.

VII. Conclusion: The Kid’s Demise, The Judge’s Dance

*Blood Meridian*’s opening sentence is an imperative in the present, demanding that its readers “[s]ee the child,” yet its concluding remark is an affirmation in the future, starkly affirming that the judge “will never die” (3, 335). Between this initial directive and the text’s ultimate declaration, readers witness the kid’s trajectory of masculinity construction in tandem with his affirmation or subtle resistance to the violent directives issued by his male superiors. This study has previously explored the kid’s charitable
concessions, and how these acts render him suspect or feminine in the eyes of the other Anglo men. Rather than neutralize the novel’s fatalistic treatment of intermittent warfare, the conclusion affirms the inveterate roots of militant masculinity in the borderlands. How it does so corresponds with the author’s representation of his young male protagonist. From beginning to end, the kid remains psychologically impenetrable, and only by virtue of his actions (violent or charitable), his sparse interactions with other men, and the narrator’s descriptions of the landscape are readers able to discern how the young protagonist matures from within this hypermasculine milieu. McCarthy’s representation of the recently formed U.S.-Mexico borderlands is a bleak one, straddling the tenuous border between Nietzschean fatalism and “ambiguous nihilism,” to use Vereen M. Bell’s phrase (“The Ambiguous Nihilism of Cormac McCarthy” 33). With chilling normalcy, racialized nationalisms fuel warfare, and genocidal violence against colored borderland people assures monetary gain for the text’s Anglo men. If there are any remaining holy spaces at all, Blood Meridian desacralizes them entirely against an equally profane landscape that affords neither sanctuary nor the promise of any higher moral code. Whereas the judge might operate as a malevolent übermensch or even, as Harold Bloom has argued, a western war god (“Introduction” ix), the kid exhibits a guarded dynamism that punctuates the novel’s thematic preoccupation with war-as-nation-building.

This section proposes that in spite of the text’s near fatalistic configuration of the borderlands, the kid cultivates a consciousness that counters the authority of his

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142 In his discussion of McCarthy’s Appalachian-themed novels, Vereen M. Bell makes observations that prove just as relevant in our approach to Blood Meridian: “moral considerations seem not to affect outcomes; action and event seem determined wholly by capricious and incomprehensible fates” (“The Ambiguous Nihilism of Cormac McCarthy” 32).
hegemonic would-be-father. By looking past racial, gender, and language barriers, and by disavowing the violent compulsions that inform Holden’s male script, the kid renounces the performances that before had allowed him to seek mentorship from would-be fathers and male camaraderie among the novel’s other Anglo men. Rather than operate as emancipatory mechanisms or as harbingers of a syncretic borderlands, though, these subversive performances advance a procedure that is doubly damning in that they render the kid a target for future violence, while also affirming, in the end, that the hypermasculine script of his former model will remain unchanged.

A decisive point for the novel’s protagonist occurs in chapter XXI when the kid has the opportunity to shoot the judge but refuses, thereby renouncing the violence he had once practiced as a member of the same expedition (*Blood Meridian* 298). Without any explanation as to how, the judge returns to the scene where both the kid and expriest lie hiding. Here, Holden challenges the kid by calling attention to the latter’s inability to enact violence at a time when it would have proven most advantageous:

The priest has led you to this, boy. I know you would not hide. I know too that you’ve not the heart of a common assassin. I’ve passed before your gunsights twice this hour and will pass a third time. Why not show yourself? No assassin ... And no partisan either. There’s a flawed place in your heart. Do you think I could not know? You alone were mutinous. You alone reserved in your soul some corner of clemency for the heathen. (299)

The kid’s concerted rejection of violence in favor of “clemency for the heathen” configures him as neither assassin nor partisan. All of this leads us to the revelation

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143 John Emil Sepich argues, “Three times in *Blood Meridian* the kid puts himself at risk to help men in danger--Sproule (63), Tate (210), and Tobin (295)” (*Notes on Blood Meridian* 136).
that however appalling the social order under Holden might be, it is one that nonetheless foregrounds war as a necessary expression of masculinity and as a requisite agent for nation-building. It is also an order that the kid ultimately rejects.

In the scene that perhaps best exhibits the kid’s opposition to his past performances (and one that casts this about-face in decidedly feminine terms), readers encounter him alongside an elderly Mexican woman, at last reciprocating the charity of the Mexican woman described earlier in chapter V (Blood Meridian 71). Here, the narrator elucidates how the kid affirms his own brand of American maleness in stark opposition to his compatriots who have “hacked and butchered” her fellow countrymen (315):

He spoke to her in a low voice. He told her that he was an American and that he was a long way from the country of his birth and that he had no family and that he had traveled much and seen many things and had been at war and endured hardships. He told her that he would convey her to a safe place, some party of her countrypeople who would welcome her and that she should join them for he could not leave her in this place or she would surely die ... Abuelita, he said. No puedes escucharme? (315)¹⁴⁴

Readers will also notice that whereas the kid had before only attempted to aid white men, the opposite transpires here. In fact, it is only here, as he attempts to aid the elderly Mexican woman, that the kid offers a number of verbal reassurances that attempt to remedy male-initiated abuses. Looking past racial and nationalist markers, the kid identifies himself as “American”, emphasizes his orphanhood, and assures her that he has “endured hardships,” all of which work to establish his actions as markers of this new

¹⁴⁴ “... Grandmother, he said. Can’t you hear me?” (my translation).
“performative version of identity,” to borrow Adam Parkes’s phrase (“History, Bloodshed and the Spectacle of American Identity in Blood Meridian” 120). Readers notice an important change: whereas in other passages readers were forced to rely on the narrator’s descriptions, here we encounter the kid’s only explicit demonstration of emotional turmoil through his dialogue with the Mexican woman.

That he offers his services to a character who is both Mexican and a woman demonstrates his disavowal of the racial and nationalistic borders that had before configured characters of color, especially women, as antagonists worthy of unfettered violence. What’s more, the language in which the kid conveys his message is of significant importance. Readers will recall that the kid begins the novel as a monolingual. Later, he speaks (a “wretched”) Spanish when he is a member of the expedition, but only as a linguistic mechanism that incites Mexicans to violence (178). Ultimately, however, we encounter the presumably bilingual kid speaking a Spanish that is polished, no longer a tool used to prompt violence against its native speakers. Nevertheless, the kid’s subversion comes too late, for we read that his figurative Abuelita “moved slightly, her whole body, light and rigid. She was just a dried shell and she had been dead in that place for years” (315). The counter-hegemonic about-face opposes the “new faith” to which the kid had once adhered, but the narrator assures us that the effects of the latter are far too deeply rooted for the redemptive intentions of the former.

The kid’s about-face is a dramatic and ultimately perplexing one, with few foundational precursors to gauge why he disavows his hyper-masculine models as the novel approaches its bleak conclusion. Violence pervades a still foreboding landscape, and the genocidal undertakings have done little to offset the long-term precarity of the
male collective. In addition to these features, though, two important constants also appear: a borderline fatalism that only astute, opportunistic men like Holden can avoid, and the kid’s sporadic concessions of (feminine) charity that disturb his performance of militant masculinity. In the novel’s final scenes, McCarthy pits the latter against the former, and the ensuing confrontation confirms that in spite of the kid’s attempts at resistance, the masculine code of the borderlands continues to privilege violence as a requisite component for making men into nation-builders. The novel’s irony is that the force that most conspires against the kid in the end is the same masculine code that he adopts in the novel’s beginning chapters. In fact, the militant masculinity of Blood Meridian appears to ultimately benefit only Judge Holden, the most ethereal and mysterious of all McCarthy’s characters, and who appears the most far-removed from the basic necessities that the other men require. The author’s use of a child protagonist allows readers to witness how violence and racialized nationalism intersect to configure men as makers or defenders of the nation-state, but it also allows us to examine the anxieties immanent to this process. These patterns of racial antipathy, American exceptionalism, and genocidal violence operate as a blueprint for the kid as he constructs his masculine persona. It is his concerted effort to counteract this framework, however, that leads to his demise.

The concluding scenes of the novel reunite Judge Holden and the kid, decades after the latter’s desertion. Key is the judge’s repudiation of his former disciple for having deviated from what the ex-priest had termed “the new faith”:

You came forward ... to take part in a work. But you were a witness against yourself. You sat in judgement on your own deeds. You put your own
allowances before the judgements of history and you broke with the body of
which you were pledged a part and poisoned it in all its enterprise. Hear me,
man. I spoke in the desert for you and you only and you turned a deaf ear to me.
If war is not holy man is nothing but antic clay. Even the cretin acted in good
faith according to his parts. For it was required of no man to give more than he
possessed nor was any man’s share compared to another’s. Only each was called
upon to empty out his heart into the common and one did not. Can you tell me
who that one was? (*Blood Meridian* 307)

Only here does the judge acknowledge the kid as a “man,” yet he does so only through
reproach. By refusing to uphold the judge’s genocidal male script, the kid refuses to
“empty out his heart into the common,” an act of defiance that both disturbs the father-
son trajectory and configures the kid as a deviant to the only semblance of order
immanent to the borderlands. For the judge, man is vegetative and remote (“antic clay”)
without the compulsion to enact the sacred nature of war. In the novel’s beginnings, the
kid acclimates to his masculine surroundings through performative compulsion, yet he
acts, in the end, as the only character who demonstrates any subversive agency
whatevover to the judge’s “dance.”

With its arcane language, use of polysyndeton, and incorporation of Biblical
imagery, it comes as little surprise that *Blood Meridian* fetters the power structures of its
diegetic space to a patriarchal infrastructure much like that of the archaic cultures that it
often perfunctorily invokes. As the novel approaches its climactic encounter between the
judge and the kid, readers should recall the judge’s earlier parable in chapter XI whereby
he postulates, as readers will recall only in retrospect, the possible outcome of a father-
son trajectory configuring both the kid and the judge in their corresponding roles. Here, the judge assures us that the son in his parable “went away to the west” and that, like his father before him, “he himself became a killer of men” (Blood Meridian 145). Rather than parallel the outcome of the judge’s parable, though, the concluding sections of the novel attest to the opposite, configuring the kid as a deviant or apostate to this arcane father-son order by repudiating the physical violence that had before ordered the lives of the male collective. In the end, the kid chooses to disassociate himself from the very order that has made him a man through the performance of its violent contingencies. By helping the “heathen” others, the kid rejects the judge’s masculine code and the violence that it necessitates, thus denying both the judge (the dancer) and the performance (the dance). By doing so, McCarthy’s protagonist experiences what Butler would term the “punishment, and violence” that ensues from such a performative aberration (“Imitation and Gender Subordination” 130). The judge issues the novel’s concluding verdict by killing the kid in an outhouse, punishing his deviation and thus forestalling any others’ attempt to follow the kid’s example. The recurring analogy between father and son establishes the novel. Its rupture, however, signals its conclusion. We are left with the judge’s one and only lamentation: “Don’t you know that I’d have loved you like a son?” (Blood Meridian 306). The kid-turned-man rejects his ever-present would-be father, just as decades before, he, as a child, rejected his ever-absent biological father. As he matures, the kid grapples with the compulsions to uphold his male leaders’ violent directives, ultimately resisting them by looking past racial and nationalistic markers. Still, these concessions fall short, enacting no change in a region “carved out in the midst of U.S. imperialism,” as José David Saldivar terms it (Border Matters 8). In fact, McCarthy
concludes his novel with an ominous affirmation of the region’s masculine norm: “He never sleeps, the judge. He is dancing, dancing. He says that he will never die” (335).

This stark, nearly fatalistic representation leaves little doubt for readers that in spite of the kid’s intermittent acts of charity, the “androcentric code” of the west will experience little change.

The novel’s much-debated epilogue witnesses an unnamed man at dawn “progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground” (*Blood Meridian* 337). The conclusion of the epilogue proves equally enigmatic: “He strikes fire in the hole and draws out his steel. Then they all move on again” (337). Harold Bloom opines that the unnamed man might be “an opposing figure in regard to the evening redness in the West” (“Introduction” xiii). This study proposes that with its imagery strongly suggesting the expansion of Western railways, the scene anticipates the beginnings of a future capitalist enterprise that will not only continue the conquest of the region, but will do so through equally violent terms by other Anglo hegemonic models.145 Holden’s “sacred war” dominates the plot of *Blood Meridian*, from its opening pages in 1833 to its concluding scenes in 1877. If war is eternal, as the judge claims, it is also true, as Kimmel has argued, that all wars “are mediations of masculinity” (*Manhood in America* 72). McCarthy suggests here that the terrain of sacred war is changing, even if men remain war’s principal actors. By analyzing the portrayal of three hegemonic Anglo male figures throughout *Blood Meridian*, readers are able to better understand how

145 In his book *Building the Continental Empire*, historian William Earl Weeks contends that “by 1850 the nation was crisscrossed by more than 9,000 miles of track. By 1860 that number had risen to 30,600 miles—more than in all of continental Europe combined” (84). Sarah Deutsch adds, “It was the railroad—symbolized by the completion of the transcontinental line in 1869—rather than the military that tipped the balance of power. It prefigured the outcome of the confrontation. The railroad, linking city to city, coast to coast, countryside to markets, symbolized national capitalism’s triumph over local autonomy” (“Landscape of Enclaves” 113).
mimesis and abjection inform the violent masculine performances of the young protagonist, as well as the compulsions that lead him to uphold the male scripts particular to each of his male models. Examined in conjunction with his three male leaders, the kid allows readers to chart a triadic deployment of male-enacted violence in the borderlands: from the crux of racialized nationalisms, through a profitable genocidal expedition, and ultimately to the compulsion to uphold intermittent warfare. The last figure we see standing (or rather, dancing) is Judge Holden. The novel’s promised father-son trajectory ruptures, but it does so at a time when the continuity of “violence-as-male-making” is nonetheless assured. How else could it be? McCarthy seems to be asking his readers if borderland violence, understood as a resource for “making men” and “making nations,” can in fact ever be forfeited. The prospect is nebulous, and the border, like its history, is long. The judge does not provide readers with an answer, but perhaps history already has. To again summon the words of President Reagan: “[n]o nation can do that and survive.”
Chapter Four: “¡Éste si que es hombre!”: Subverting the Coloniality of (Masculine) Power in Texas: La gran ladronería en el lejano norte (2012) by Carmen Boullosa

“Then came the climax of all border troubles in the person of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina ... the most striking, the most powerful, the most insolent, and the most daring as well as the most elusive Mexican bandit ... that ever wet his horse in the muddy waters of the Rio Bravo.”146

-J. Frank Dobie

I. Introduction

In 1848, the Mexican government, under the command of Antonio López de Santa Anna, signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, thereby ending the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-48) and consequently forfeiting over half of its national territory to the United States, led by then-president and avid expansionist James K. Polk. The annexation-through-conquest of the present-day Southwest reflected decades of expansionist aspirations, at the same that it responded to the threat of European invasion in regions like Texas, whose land would, and ultimately did, prove advantageous for agricultural production, particularly cotton.147 The land was often viewed favorably, while those occupying the land (particularly Mexicans) proved burdensome because of both their racial ambiguity and their contested claims to territorial governance and cultural legitimacy. Indeed, Sam Houston himself famously argued that “Mexicans are no better than Indians,” later adding, “I see no reason why we should not go on the same course, now, and take their land” (qtd. in Foley, White Scourge 21). The war’s contentious legacy even led Mexican poet and diplomat Octavio Paz, writing in the mid-twentieth century, to

146 Quote obtained from Jerry D. Thompson’s book Cortina: Defending the Mexican Name in Texas (1).
147 Zachary Taylor’s comments to the U.S. Congress on April 22, 1844, give insight into the importance of annexing Texas in terms of its economic and agricultural import: “The country itself thus obtained [Texas] is of incalculable value in an agricultural and commercial point of view. To the soil of inexhaustible fertility it unites a genial and healthy climate, and is destined at a day not distant to make a large contribution to the commerce of the world ... The question is one purely American” (qtd. in Weeks, Building the Continental Empire 101)
term the conflict “una de las guerras más injustas en la historia, ya de por sí negra, de la expansion imperialista” (*El laberinto de la soledad* 268).  

This study proposes that Carmen Boullosa’s novel *Texas: La gran ladronería en el lejano norte* (2012) affixes this legacy of conquest to the performance of Anglo masculine codes. By doing so, the text foregrounds race, legitimate citizenship, and capital accumulation as forces that augment a calculus of power in the Lower Rio Grande Valley for the benefit of the region’s Anglo male entrepreneurs. Throughout the novel, both the Mexican and Anglo male characters strive for control over the region and its resources through strategic calls to competing manhood acts. These masculine performances incorporate different forms of violence in order to either preserve the economic order and juridical apparatus that safeguard the hegemony of the Anglo men, or to contest these stalwarts altogether through insurrectionary action. These processes, in turn, qualify the female characters as moral paragons, sexual objects, or symbolic conduits for masculine performance. In spite of these constraints, however, and in more overt ways than we saw in *Caballero* and *Blood Meridian*, the women, both white and of color, transgress these limitations by articulating claims to agency in diverse ways that contest the region’s heteronormative, capitalist social order.

While all three of the novels studied here incorporate omniscient narrators and similar diegetic settings, the authors represent nationalism, violence, and gendered power in distinct ways. McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*, we recall, reifies the racial logic of Manifest Destiny through the prism of homosocial (mimetic) male desire, and the physical and epistemic violence that this masculine order necessitates, by virtue of three

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148 “one of the most unjust wars in the already black and unjust history of imperialist expansion” (my translation).
hegemonic male authority figures. In doing so, the novel posits these particular forms of violence against colored borderland dwellers as forces that allow the Anglo male characters to become men through the shared bonds of white nationalism and economic necessity. The commodification of brown bodies that sustains the text’s scalp-hunting expedition normalizes physical violence against non-whites for the sake of monetary gain. This process rationalizes the novel’s atrocities as necessary undertakings for the economic benefit of Anglo male outsiders, who operate, in the end, as the region’s dominant social group. The epilogue of the novel points toward the perpetuation of this legacy of conquest in economic terms. In González and Raleigh’s *Caballero*, as we have seen, the advent of Anglo-led capitalism operates very differently, playing both a damning and potentially emancipatory role for the women who suffer the brunt of Mexican patriarchy. Here, the advent of this economic order offsets the longstanding notions of Mexican (Spanish) racial purity by fettering questions of legitimate citizenship to (Anglo) whiteness and capital accumulation. This operation questions the authority of the Mexican patriarch while casting the Anglo males in ambivalent roles as both imperialists and emancipators. The women, in turn, act out an interstitial agency within the limits of heteronormative marriage, without necessarily endorsing the male-dominated capitalist social order that sustains this process altogether. By representing the characters and the borderlands in such ambivalent terms, the authors seek to neutralize some of the pervasive anti-Mexican stereotypes and racial antipathies that plagued the Texas borderlands in the early twentieth century.

Like González and Raleigh, Boullosa also narrativizes through a masculinist scope the social impact of a nascent capitalism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, but she
does so in more critical terms, focusing on its violence within a moral calculus of American exceptionalism. Boullosa deconstructs the legitimacy of this cultural paradigm since for the Anglo male characters, it is this same cultural repository that sanctions physical and economic violence against borderland residents of color through moral compulsions, gender scripts, or a logic of progress. Rather than engage war in terms of homosocial nationalism (like McCarthy) or guerrilla conflict and heterosexual love (like González and Raleigh), Texas shifts the terrain of combat altogether to the field of Anglo-led capitalism, which, to quote sociologist Michael Schwalbe, both compels “the performance of manhood acts ... [and] helps to reproduce capitalist relations of production” (Manhood Acts 107).

Boullosa’s seventeenth novel, Texas narrativizes the exploits of the historical Mexican-American folk hero Juan Cortina Nepomuceno and his followers as a “counter-myth,” as historian and literary critic Richard Slotkin uses the term,¹⁴⁹ that challenges the Anglo male characters’ political, economic, and gender hegemony within the diegetic space of the Lower Rio Grande Valley between 1859 and 1860, some eleven years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Nepomuceno leads several characters of Mexican background in a rebellion to counteract what they view as the land theft made by Anglo entrepreneurs. The latter resist these efforts, plotting ways to forestall these attempts and ensure their own positions of power. Throughout the novel, Boullosa counterpoises the actions and discourses of these two groups of men with those of several

¹⁴⁹ In “Fiction for the Purposes of History,” Slotkin underscores the potential benefits of historical fiction as follows: “Precisely because the novel imaginatively recovers the indeterminacy of a past time, it is not bound simply to celebrate the mere outcome; but leaves the writer and reader free to explore those alternative possibilities for belief, action and political change, unrealized by history, which existed in the past. In so doing, the novelist may restore, as imaginable possibilities, the ideas, movements and values defeated or discarded in the struggles that produced the modern state—may produce a counter-myth, to play into and against the prevailing myths of the nation” (231).
female characters, both Anglo and Mexican, highlighting how the efforts to preserve or regain power in the borderlands emerge through complex hierarchies that intertwine race and gender. A non-linear novel boasting an impressive panoply of historical figures, *Texas* portrays characters of color who contest the alleged land left controlled by Anglo entrepreneurs, as well as the endemic violence of the juridical apparatus, economic forces, and racialized political ideologies that keep the latter in positions of power. The Mexican-American folk hero Juan Nepomuceno functions as the text’s protagonist, crossing the border between Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Tamaulipas, as he rallies like-minded Mexicans to contest the land theft (the titular “ladronería”) spearheaded by Anglo men. While Boullosa chooses a contentious Mexican-American figure for her protagonist, she does the opposite for her antagonist, opting for an historical figure, Charles Stillman (stylized “Stealman” in the novel, perhaps to emphasize his theft: *stealman*), who is remembered both as the founder of Brownsville, Texas, and a successful entrepreneur in the same region. Stealman opposes Nepomuceno’s actions, justifying his business dealings and economic overreach through a colonial perspective of Anglo male privilege. By pitting the former against the latter, Boullosa examines the nationalistic discourses and racialized ideologies that sanction territorial expansion and entrepreneurial investment, positing both as mechanisms that reinforce the Anglo male characters’ claims to power in the recently acquired territory.

At the same time, however, the text ultimately disturbs and transgresses these gendered prerogatives by privileging the counter-hegemonic strategies and discourses of characters who might otherwise stand at the periphery of this imagined community--

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150 While race and gender heavily influenced social hierarchies in the Texas-Mexico borderlands, class also played an important role. For more information on this topic, consult Neil Foley’s *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*. 
especially women (both white and of color) and Mexican men. The narrative tension that underpins the trajectories of the characters analyzed here stems from the novel’s implicit criticism of male-enacted violence as a way to reinforce claims to citizenship, territorial governance, and cultural legitimacy in this contested territory.\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Texas} undermines these masculine scripts by offering a more contrapuntal reading, to use Edward Said’s phrase, that recasts Lower Rio Grande Valley conflict in terms of its attempted elision of women and its competing masculine codes against the backdrop of a nascent capitalism.\textsuperscript{152} In spite of the male characters’ domination of these political and economic forces, the female characters here assert greater agency by contesting the region’s deeply rooted gender prescriptions, exposing and ultimately dismantling the logic of patriarchal coloniality in which the Anglo males’ claims to power ultimately take root.

\textbf{II. Theoretical Framework and Argument}

In order to better understand how Anglo masculine power in this text converges with, complements, and is sustained by a nascent capitalist enterprise, this study incorporates Anibal Quijano’s vision regarding the “coloniality of power”. This theoretical model proposes that colonizers often develop and advance racial hierarchies in occupied territories in order to legitimize their claims to political, economic, and epistemic power (“Colonialidad del poder” 139). Emerging from Western capitalist expansion, this process, Quijano argues, both codifies social discriminations against the backdrop of Western rationality, and also overrides preexisting, non-capitalist

\textsuperscript{151} In her short essay regarding the strategic use of violence by Anglos at the birth of the modern-day border, Boullosa writes, “Una ola de violencia se desató en la guerra México-States Unidos. Dependiendo de quién cuente la historia, la violencia se ensañó contra los de origen mexicano, o la violencia previno de éstos. En la versión que explica que venía de los mexicanos, éstos eran bandidos y robavacas, de raza sin remedio o ‘malos mexicanos’, burladores de la ley y el orden” (“Violencias” 9).

\textsuperscript{152} Said argues that a ‘contrapuntal reading’ of a text must take into account both the workings of imperialism as well as characters’ resistance to imperialism (\textit{Culture and Imperialism} 66).
epistemologies (“Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality” 171-2). Since many of Boullosa’s characters speak from what Gac-Artigas has termed “el silencio impuesto” (imposed silence) (“Carmen Boullosa y los caminos de la escritura” 187), this framework allows readers of Boullosa’s novel to better interrogate how the intersection of an alleged Anglo supremacy and capitalist entrepreneurialism locate Anglo men in positions of hegemony. In fact, readers of Texas quickly realize that the entrepreneurial Anglo men employ forms of violence against borderland residents of color because of perceived moral compulsions or masculine scripts. The text links the ascendance of Anglo-pioneered capitalism and the concomitant expansion of the United States empire to the machinations of a nineteenth-century Anglo male code. Whereas Caballero configures its Anglo male characters in ambivalent terms, and while Blood Meridian examines the compulsions toward violence through a young male protagonist, Texas unambiguously qualifies its Anglo male characters as colonial outsiders complicit with an illegitimate enterprise.

The insights of colonial scholars Walter Mignolo (2005) and Freya Schiwy (2010) here also prove particularly helpful. Criticizing a Western capitalist episteme that he has termed Occidentalism, Mignolo proposes that the commercial imperatives endemic to modernity reify social categories in order to reinforce colonial power structures (“‘Un paradigma otro’” 142, The Idea of Latin America xiii). Schiwy makes a similar observation in this regard, proposing that both race and gender “interact, coalescing into gender specific forms of oppression and meshing longstanding imaginaries in order to justify hierarchies of subjectivity, economic and political as well as epistemic orders associated with these subjectivities” (“Decolonization and the Question of Subjectivity”
This case study proposes that Boullosa’s text identifies the Anglo male characters as colonial agents by virtue of their complicity with an expanding capitalist enterprise as they construct and perform their masculinities. Against the backdrop of moral compulsions and nationalism, and in opposition to women and characters of color, the Anglo male archetype studied here focuses on territorial accumulation in order to bolster his masculine identity and normalize the gender-racial logic that sustains this same enterprise. Whereas González and Raleigh and McCarthy examine the excesses of Anglo masculinity in unique ways, Boullosa interrogates the legitimacy of these Anglo male privileges in more critical terms, deconstructing them through a twofold operation: by privileging both the insurrectionary actions of the Mexican men and the non-normative gender performances undertaken by the text’s women, both Anglo and Mexican.

The latter in particular contest the primacy of the region’s new heteronormative capitalist social order by transgressing dominant gender scripts and the binary logic from which they emerge. This case study examines the characters of Doña Estefanía and Sarah Ferguson along these lines, with the former demonstrating her ranch skills and pragmatic cunning in defiance of social norms, while the latter cross-dresses in order to challenge the limitations on female visibility and, ultimately, to achieve personal goals. This process reflects what Mignolo and Schiwy term “border thinking”—a critical engagement that promotes “a place of epistemic and political confrontation [that] undoes the dichotomies that sustained the modern/colonial world system and its hegemonic epistemology” (“Transculturación and Colonial Difference” 25). The interventions of Doña Estefanía (Mexican) and Sarah Ferguson (Anglo) foster a “double consciousness of subalterns in confrontation with hegemony” (25). Both act from within this type of
“border thinking”\textsuperscript{153} and by doing so each works to offset the primacy of the dominant racial and gender logic that position the region’s Anglo male entrepreneurs in hegemonic positions. How, then, do these manifestations arise in \textit{Texas} and, specifically, within this colonial network of male power? What forms of resistance do the non-Anglo characters undertake, and how do their actions counter a calculus of male power that this capitalist order both demands and perpetuates? This chapter responds to these questions in two ways.

First, this chapter analyzes the novel’s representation of two masculine archetypes--that of the Anglo Charles Stealman and the aforementioned Nepomuceno--each of whom employs physical and/or economic violence to either preserve or contest Anglo cultural and territorial hegemony in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. This study contends that the character of Charles Stealman embodies the nineteenth-century ethos of self-made manhood and entrepreneurial capitalism, which in turn extends the borderlands’ “legacy of conquest” (Limerick, \textit{Legacy of Conquest} 18) from a domain of purely physical violence against women and people of color to one of economic disenfranchisement.\textsuperscript{154} Much like the territorial conquest that Stealman advances, his economic domination of the region operates through a colonial logic of racialized exclusion that qualifies Anglo men as both producers and benefactors of cultural and

\textsuperscript{153} For more information about the concept of “border thinking” (\textit{pensamiento fronterizo}), consult Mignolo (“\textit{Un paradigma otro}” 142) and Saldivar (“Unsettling Race, Coloniality, and Caste” 193). The term, elaborated at length by Mignolo, was inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa, who in her book \textit{Borderlands / La Frontera}, writes about the need for a new type of consciousness, which she terms “la conciencia de la mestiza” (the consciousness of the mestiza) (77). For more information about the latter, consult chapter 7 of Anzaldúa’s aforementioned study.

\textsuperscript{154} R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt advocate for more nuanced attention to the “geography of masculinities,” and how local, regional, and global masculine codes affect the construction and performance of hegemonic male scripts (“Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept” 848).
economic capital. By fomenting “la gran ladronería” via false land titles and his own entrepreneurial overreach in the Brownsville region, Stealman foregrounds maleness alongside autonomy, whiteness, and capital accumulation, thereby solidifying his standing as the novel’s hegemonic presence. By doing so, this figure links questions of citizenship and its attendant notions of cultural legitimacy to the co-constituting domains of whiteness and maleness—a practice that demands the violent confrontation with, or removal of, Mexican men who are alternately labeled as dangerous or culturally and racially retrograde. The imagined fraternity of Anglo men that coalesces with and emerges from Stealman’s capitalist enterprise codifies the coloniality of male power by legitimizing racial and gender hierarchies through rationales of economic necessity or cultural superiority.

Conversely, the figure of Juan Nepomuceno employs strategies of violent rebellion to make intelligible the demands of Mexicans, like himself, who lack the economic standing and legal resources to reassert their claims to territorial governance and cultural representation in the contested borderland territory. Readers realize that the

155 Boullosa’s representation here is not without historical precedent. As Sarah Deutsch explains, “Land claims courts determined Hispanic land grant ownership based on Anglo, not Hispanic, law, and the Dawes Severalty Act provided for the individual allotment of Indian lands only to adult males. Both were symbols and realities of the primacy (though not totality) of Anglo conceptions of property and manliness by 1900” (“Landscape of Enclaves” 118).

156 Writing with regards to the complicated policies of land transaction in nineteenth-century Texas, historian Jerry D. Thompson writes that “in the Trans-Nueces, the State of Texas was determined to settle the titles to the lands, and Article VIII of the Texas Constitution allowed for the confiscation of land if the owner had left the land vacant or refused to participate in the Texas Revolution or aided the Mexicans in the conflict. The uncertainty about the exact boundaries of many of the grants also invited litigation and acted against the natives, as did their lack of English language skills and knowledge of the American legal system. A number of individuals, including Charles Stillman, Richard King, Mifflin Kennedy, Stephen Powers, and James G Browne built large land holdings and fortunes on the ruins of Spanish land grants” (Cortina 20).

157 In her discussion concerning continental expansion and Anglo masculinities, Amy S. Greenburg writes that “expansionism offered an opportunity to impress the superiority of Protestant manhood on Catholic men” (Manifest Manhood 111) and that “Americans understood their relationship with Latin America in gendered terms. The United States was the dominant power because it was vigorous, and the states of Latin America should be submissive because they were not” (100).
convergence of false legal documents, Anglo-Saxon racial ideologies, and Anglo-pioneered capitalism all work to colonize the Lower Rio Grande Valley under the supervision of white male entrepreneurs, among whom Stealman holds a preeminent position. Whereas the latter defines manhood alongside whiteness, capital accumulation, and “self-made man” autonomy, Nepomuceno invokes the pan-continental identity marker “norteamericano” to disturb those narrow confines of legitimate citizenship. How these two characters employ violence likewise demonstrates a stark contrast. Stealman himself does not undertake physical violence against Mexicans (although he does endorse it by others), preferring instead a concerted effort to dominate the region economically in order to “limpiar Brunesville” (clean Brownsville) by removing or marginalizing Mexican(-American)s altogether. Meanwhile, Nepomuceno, with the help of his followers, deploys physical violence against Anglos as a counter-hegemonic resource to contest the dominant racial and nationalistic discourses that situate Anglo men in positions of power, and to assert the land and citizenship rights of “la raza”—Mexican borderland residents who suffer the brunt of “la gran ladroneria.”

Second, this chapter explores against whom these male characters perform, and thus reinforce, their particular male scripts. Whereas Caballero allowed only an interstitial agency for its female characters within a domestic setting, and while Blood Meridian represented its women as simple conduits for masculinity construction, Texas privileges the voices and strategies of its female characters (both Mexican and American) who interrogate, parody, or contest the masculine performances of the novel’s male characters by rejecting stratified gender roles. This chapter examines doña Estefanía (Nepomuceno’s mother) who defies feminine norms by successfully managing a vast
estate, garnering many admirers and enemies before Stealman ultimately steals her property; and Sarah Ferguson, who parodies masculine performance by cross-dressing in order to partake in activities deemed masculine. This process ultimately offsets the authority of the men in her presence, as they come to fear and admire her. As we shall see, through their interrogations of masculine performances, these characters ultimately contest the masculine privileges and normalizing discourses of gender and race that situate the Anglo male characters in positions of power.¹⁵⁸

III. Historical backdrop

III.A. Boullosa and her Generation

Born in 1954, Carmen Boullosa has emerged as one of Mexico’s leading and most celebrated novelists since the publication of her first novel Mejor desaparece in 1987. Throughout her career, Boullosa has used historical backdrops in order to explore the elisions of Mexican history, which, according to literary scholar Ute Seydel, has often taken an androcentric approach by promoting women’s invisibility within the historical archive (Narrar historia(s) 34). Boullosa has written prolifically and across genres. Having authored several plays, essays, novels, and books of poetry, Boullosa does not consider herself a feminist writer, but her narratives do explore the asymmetrical relations of gendered power throughout several historical periods in her native Mexico.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Responding to early criticism about the potential pitfalls of hegemonic masculinities, R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt argue in their article “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept” that “[g]ender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) or femininity” (848).

¹⁵⁹ In her interview with Ellen Spielmann in which she discusses her writing process, Boullosa affirms, “No me considero una escritora feminista porque las necesidades del texto literario son muy otras y muy grandes. El texto tiene su propia órbita y su propio ordenamiento--su propia moralidad” (“Entrevista con Carmen Boullosa” 261) / (“I don’t consider myself a feminist writer because the needs of the literary text are many and very large. The text has its own orbit and its own set of laws--its own morality” my translation).
Literary scholar Raymond Leslie Williams locates Boullosa within the “late postmodern” tradition of Mexican authors and argues that through “fragmentation, multiple narrators, [and] high levels of ambiguity,” Boullosa requires an active reader much like the Boom generation of Latin American writers during the 1960s and 70s (“Postmodern Novel 42). According to scholar Julio Ortega, Boullosa’s generation, writing after the so-called “Onda” movement, “se demuestra [por una parte] desencantada con el poder político y su sombra, el poder cultural. Por otra, establece con el escenario urbano y la museología histórica relaciones de ironía desmitificadora y crítica corrosiva” (“La identidad literaria de Carmen Boullosa” 141).

Like its bildungsroman predecessor, Boullosa’s second novel Antes (1989) also examines the effects of childhood trauma on its female protagonist. The novel garnered the author international recognition, as well as the Premio Villaurrutura in the same year (Williams, The Postmodern Novel 23). With the publication of Son vacas, somos puercos (1991), however, Boullosa reconfigured her narrative scope, leaving the bildungsroman genre and opting for a distant historical backdrop to address the themes of gendered power, resistance, and subalternity. The theme of conquest as it relates to Mexico’s history is not entirely new for Boullosa, in the same way that her generation has sought to question the legitimacy of conventional historical discourses.

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160 Ortega explains that the Onda movement, which came to prominence in the 1960s, dealt largely with “urban bohemianism, idiomatic idiosyncrasies, and juvenile mythology” (my translation, “La identidad literaria de Carmen Boullosa” 141).

161 “[Boullosa’s generation] shows itself to be disenchanted with political power and its shadow--cultural power. On the other hand, it establishes relations of demythologizing irony and caustic criticism with the urban scene and with historical museology” (my translation).

162 Her Llanto: novelas imposibles (1992) likewise engages similar topics by narrativizing the captivity of Moctezuma in present-day Mexico City. Scholar Carrie C. Chorba argues that in Llanto, Boullosa “uses the faulty and incomplete historic textuality to create a metaphoric reworking that textually mimics the methods, perspectives, and discourses of history on the pages of fiction” (“The Actualization of a Distant Past” 311).
Speaking directly in regards to the role of contemporary Mexican writers, Boullosa reflects upon her own generation as follows in a 1999 interview with Gabriella de Beer:

Opino que vivimos un momento muy afortunado y muy peligroso, un momento que no vivimos nosotras por primera vez, una relación que nosotras no disfrutamos por primera vez, porque los escritores mexicanos tenemos una tradición muy peculiar. El escritor mexicano no es un paria o un marginado. El escritor mexicano tiene tanto que ver con el mundo del poder y con la vida pública que incluso el discurso oficial del Estado mexicano es inventado por los intelectuales y los artistas. (“Entrevista” 208-9)¹⁶³

Boullosa’s admission that Mexican writers should strive to challenge dominant narratives, especially those emanating from the echelons of government agencies, is not itself without historical precedent.

According to Ute Seydel, the Mexican government’s 1968 massacre of dissident students at Tlatelolco had forged a paradigm shift among Mexican writers, forcing a reckoning of consciousness regarding the legitimacy of historical meta-narratives and the people or agencies that craft them (Narrar historia(s) 123). Julio Ortega, though, places less importance on the 1968 massacre and identifies the events of the late to mid 1980s as forces that more significantly influenced Boullosa’s generation of writers.¹⁶⁴ For his part,

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¹⁶³ “I am of the opinion that we live a very fortunate and very dangerous moment, a moment that we aren’t living for the first time, a relationship that we aren’t enjoying for the first time, because we Mexican writers have a very peculiar tradition. The Mexican writer is not a pariah or outcast. The Mexican writer has as much to do with the world of power and with public life that even the official discourse of the Mexican state is invented by artists and intellectuals” (my own translation).
¹⁶⁴ “Carmen Boullosa habla desde un espacio poético liberado por Octavio Paz y Carlos Fuentes, pero también desde su propio tiempo, marcado ya no por la saga de 1968 (que fractura la articulación de estado y sociedad), sino por el sismo de 1985 (que instaura la desterritorialización de la vida civil) ... Pertenece ella al movimiento de exploración literario que después de los ‘grandes relatos’ epocales se dedica a los...
Williams outlines an even larger constellation of cultural and political phenomena that informed the writings of Boullosa and her generation: Mexico’s increasing dependence on technology and trade in a globalizing market, the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, the 1994 Chiapas uprising, the devaluations of the Mexican peso throughout the 1980s and 90s, and the ubiquity of television and English-language pop music (with their Spanish-language variants) throughout the latter half of the twentieth century (*The Postmodern Novel* 25-31). These developments, especially the Mexican government’s illegitimate use of state-sanctioned violence (in Tlatelolco and elsewhere), reflected and/or converged with the entrenched political hegemony of Mexico’s reigning political party: the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Thus, according to Williams, during the mid to late twentieth century, “truth was no longer a viable possibility for a generation of Mexicans [and as a result,] the crisis of truth was generalized in postmodern Mexico” (24).

Growing up within and writing in response to these political and cultural phenomena, Boullosa “defamiliariz[e] the reader with official history,” to use Marina Pérez de Mendiola’s phrase, in order to interrogate “the methods which permitted the acquisition and transmittal of such knowledge” (*Gender and Identity Formation* 22). *Texas*, her first novel to take place along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, narrativizes the effects of U.S. imperialism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, often privileging the vantage points of seemingly marginal historical figures who attempt to resist and offset the hegemony of an expanding capitalist United States. To better understand how, and why, the author crafts...
her fiction as an assault on the historical record, readers must remain conscious of how Boullosa herself approaches history as material for her narratives.

III.B. “Toda la historia es ficticia. Toda es ficticia pero toda podría ser real”: the Role of History and the Transgression of Meta-Narratives in Texas

Since its popularization by English novelist Sir Walter Scott in the early nineteenth century, the historical novel has enjoyed widespread popularity and has undergone numerous transformations. Several critics, including George Lukács, Herbert Butterfield, and Alfred Tresidder Sheppard, have approached the genre from a number of different vantage points. In recent decades, though, changes in Anglo historiography (as seen in the work of historians Patricia Nelson Limerick, Richard Slotkin, and Hayden White, among others) have fractured the dichotomy separating narrative and history. In his article, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” for example, Hayden White affirms that narrative—“a metacode ... on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted”--constitutes the form of all historical accounts, while questions of authority (the right to narrate and moralize) underpin the socio-political order that the accounts themselves represent (15-18).

165 Writing within a Marxist framework, Lukács links the historical novel’s evolution to the Revolution of 1848 in Western and Central Europe (The Historical Novel 171). Butterfield, meanwhile, argues in his 1924 book The Historical Novel that the genre of the same name exists because of “a certain inadequacy in history itself” (21), which might be supplemented with a fictional narrative rooted in geography (41). In The Art and Practice of Historical Fiction, Sheppard differs from both by arguing that in the historical novel “no unnecessary departures from fact should be permitted; the more closely the facts are followed the better is the book” (160). While his comments are in stark contrast to the text studied here, Sheppard did make the astute observation that “women writers will play a most important part in the future of the historical novel, and also in the future of serious history” (274).

166 In his article “Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality,” White extends his analysis to how the concept of time has traditionally been treated by historians. White argues that “[p]rior to its disciplinization in the nineteenth century, historiography was informed by an idea of time in which the future featured quite as prominently as the past as an object of study and reflection. Recall that Western historiography did not descend directly from its antique classical prototype but passed through the alembic of Medieval Christian and, then, Protestant enthusiastic futurism (millenarianism, apocalypticism). It has always had a propensity to speculation about the future, a tendency which translates into what Reinhart Koselleck calls a ‘horizon of expectations’ which authorizes studies of the past in the interest of not so
Particularly fruitful for this study is White’s contention that omissions and exclusions inform historical accounts as much as do the inclusions (18). In Texas, Boulosa grapples with those gaps and seeks to recuperate the voices, thoughts, and actions of seemingly peripheral characters who nonetheless push back against a nascent capitalist social order that encodes American exceptionalism and perpetuates Anglo male economic and political hegemony.

The historical novel in Latin America has likewise experienced evolution, often defying European or Anglo models either because of its colonial history (Larsen, “A Note” 127) or, in the past century, because of the confluence of the vanguard and modernist traditions (Seydel, Narrar historia(s) 124). Seymour Menton argues in Latin America’s New Historical Novel that four major generations of Latin American novelists, beginning with Alejo Carpentier, have spearheaded what he terms the “new historical” genre. Even so, Menton fails to mention the contributions of women writers in this process (22-4), thus ignoring how these authors develop what scholar Amy K. Kaminsky terms “presence--the making visible of the invisible ... in the face of erasure and silencing” (Reading the Body Politic 25). Boulosa herself has affirmed a position similar to that of Kaminsky in her interview with Gabriella De Beer, proposing that “[t]oda la historia es ficticia. Toda es ficticia pero toda podría ser real” (“Entrevista” much predicting the future as, rather, of seeking to have an influence on its shape or form or content” (156-7).

In spite of his omission of women writers, Seymour outlines six characteristics of the new historical genre, which include “[t]he conscious distortion of history through omissions, exaggerations, and anachronisms,” the “utilization of famous historical characters as protagonists,” and both metafiction and intertextuality (22-4).

In “Vertiente histórica y procesos intertextuales en Duerme” literary critic Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco makes a similar observation regarding Boulosa’s novel Duerme, although the same could easily be said of the strategies undertaken in Texas: “podemos afirmar que su impulso se cierne en torno a un proyecto de alteridad, a una urgencia por ser diferente y convocar las diversidades en múltiples niveles de significación” (145). / “we can affirm that her impulse reaches toward a project of alterity, an urgency to be different and to bring together diversities in multiple levels of signification” (my translation).
Since the publication of Boullosa’s *Novelas imposibles* (1992), several critics, including Javier G. Vilaltella, Oswaldo Estrado, and Nelly Zamora-Bello have examined how the author’s representation of characters’ individual histories qualifies, displaces, and/or deconstructs the accepted narratives that emerge from Mexican historiography. In an interview with Emily Hind, Boullosa herself has affirmed that (Mexican) writers should not represent the past as impermeable or beyond revision, since both the past and the present remain open to critical interrogation. This study concurs with scholar Erna Pfeiffer, who contends that “[l]a escritura histórica, para la mujer latinoamericana, es una de las posibilidades de enfrentarse a las distorsiones del discurso patriarcal hegemónico” and that by virtue of such a process, “sería posible reinscribir a la mujer ausente en la Historia” (“La historia como pre-texto” 145, 148). In *Texas*, Boullosa fragments her narrative temporally, switching back and forth between the past and the present, and

169 “all history is fictitious. All is fictitious but it could also be real” (my translation).

170 Vilaltella argues that throughout Boullosa’s texts “surgen nuevos espacios textuales, al margen de lo estrictamente disciplinar, que sirven de campo experimental para los nuevos textos historiográficos” (“Lugares de memoria, imaginación y relato” 99) / “new textual spaces arise, at the margin of what is strictly disciplinary which serves as an experimental course for new textual historiographies” (my translation). Estrado, meanwhile, insists that “[h]istory is no longer an irrefutable absolute and can be approached as an ambiguous scenario of conflicting questions that remain unanswered” (“(Re)Constructions of Memory and Identity in Carmen Boullosa’s Postcolonial Writings” 133). For her part, Zamora-Bello proposes that Boullosa’s texts, such as *Son vacas, somos puercos*, illustrate “la fusion de la historia y la ficción por medio del condicionamiento histórico de la ficción y de la estructuración discursiva de la historia” (“Son vacas, somos puercos: una metaficción historiográfica de Carmen Boullosa.” 155-6) / “the fusion of history and fiction by means of the historical conditioning of fiction and of the discursive structuring of history” (my translation).

171 Specifically, Boullosa argues, “Incluso cuando uno trabaja en el presente, como autor, o como autor mexicano, no debe tomarlo como una situación consolidada y sagrada sino como una situación sujeta a revisión y como si fuera el pasado que, aunque esté muy documentado, también está siempre sujeto a revisión. Y ese espacio donde todo se pone en entredicho, es el espacio previo a la escritura literaria. En ese sentido, trabajar con algo histórico o con algo presente, si no es idéntico, es equivalente” (interview with Hind, “Entrevista con Carmen Boullosa” 25) / “Even when one works in the present, as an author, or as a Mexican author, he or she shouldn’t take it as a consolidated and sacred situation, but rather as a situation subject to revision and as if it were the past that, although it is documented, is also always subject to revision. And that space where everything is questioned is the space previous to literary writing. In this sense, to work with something historical or with something present, if it isn’t identical, it is certainly equivalent” (my translation).

172 “historical writing, for the Latin American woman, is one of the possibilities of confronting the distortions of hegemonic patriarchal discourse [and that by virtue of such a process] it might be possible to re-write the absent woman into History” (my translation).
forcing readers to examine the conflicting discourses and interlocking power struggles that privilege certain characters over others. Divided in two sections, the text contains no chapters, and its interpenetration of different discourses from across race and gender spectrums allows reader to witness how the seemingly peripheral women and characters of color disturb the region’s masculine coloniality of power.

In Texas, Boullosa represents history as a polyvocal discursive matrix, radically heterogeneous, and charged with what Carrie C. Chorba terms “overlapping voices—decentering the ‘truth’ about the past” in a “multilayered textuality” (“The Actualization of a Distant Past” 301). The novel begins with the interaction between Juan Nepomuceno Cortina and Sheriff Shears, after the latter insults the former with the disparaging term “grasiento pelado” (greasy lowlife) (Texas 17). As the text progresses, characters repeat, interpret, affirm, and contest this epithet and the interaction in question. Because of this, readers are forced to navigate through conflicting discourses among distinct groups of characters in order to, as Maria Dolores Bolívar contends, “recuperar y reinterpretar el papel protagónico de las voces heterogéneas” (“Historia, ficción” 45).

In addition to performing what Chorba would term an “assault on the official story” (“The Actualization of a Distant Past” 311), Boullosa also incorporates techniques that force readers to attend to the subaltern voices of characters who employ counter-hegemonic strategies in the androcentric borderlands. In his article concerning Boullosa’s representation of historical memory, Oswaldo Estrado, for example, lists “omissions, exaggerations, anachronisms, metafiction, intertextuality, parody,

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173 “recuperate and reinterpret the leading role of heterogenous voices” (my translation).
174 Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak argues that Western historiography exists by virtue of what she terms “epistemic violence”—that is, through its elision of subaltern peoples and voices, which thus works within the service of empire (“Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography” 220). See also her oft-cited article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (33).
heteroglossia, and the use of famous historical characters as protagonists” as common techniques in Boullosa’s writing, contending that these same mechanisms advance “a postcolonial perspective that explicitly and obsessively manipulates the past to highlight unresolved identity conflicts” (“(Re)Constructions of Memory and Identity in Carmen Boullosa’s Postcolonial Writings” 132). This study concurs with Fatima Mujčinovic, who argues that “the reality of minority subjects cannot be represented in an orderly and linear narrative: the female condition in patriarchy or the experience of the oppressed under authoritarianism, for example, find the most powerful representation through ruptured and dislocated textual moments” (Postmodern Cross-Culturalism and Politization in the U.S. Latina Literature 15). In Texas, Boullosa uses these disjunctures and narrative fragmentations in order to trouble dominant discourses that might otherwise preclude the voices of women and characters of color. As Anna Reid affirms, Boullosa’s historically themed texts “undermine the historiography of conquest” and thus open up “the gaps within the historiography of the period [in such a way that] alternative or imagined versions of a subterranean past surface and call into question the narrative of a History which has become institutionalized” (“The Operation of Orality and Memory” 182). If for Boullosa history must be approached critically in terms of its erasures and elisions, Texas extends this critical interrogation through a masculinist lens. Here, the author probes the construction of Anglo self-made manhood and sharply criticizes its economic logic both as a corollary to territorial conquest and as a catalyst for gender and racial stratification.

\[175\] In her article “Carmen Boullosa y los caminos de la escritura” critic Priscilla Gac-Artigas makes a similar observation with regards to much of Boullosa’s other historically-based novels: “La Historia no tiene una sola voz, existen las voces de la Historia, muchas de las cuales sólo pueden hablar desde el silencio impuesto” (187). / “History does not have a single voice. The many voices of History exist, many of which can only speak from an imposed silence” (my translation).
III.C. “Todos somos hombre y mujer”: The Role of Gender in Boullosa’s Narratives

While Boullosa has affirmed the existence of a “feminine” way of writing, she has not restricted the technique to women alone, affirming that she herself frequently crosses gender borders when crafting her narratives.176 Still, Boullosa, who considers herself a writer “sin sexo, a veces hombre, a veces mujer, a veces mucho de las dos cosas, a veces un poquito de ambas o de ninguna” (interview with Cruz, “Escribo en un acto doloroso” 68),177 confesses that while she does not claim to understand men, she does understand that, like women, men too suffer the burdens of gender construction and performance (interview with Hind, “Entrevista con Carmen Boullosa” 28).178 Rather than espouse a static view of gender in terms of rigid sex roles, Boullosa’s texts explore the compulsions and contradictions that subtend the gender scripts of both her male and female characters. Like her view of masculinity, her position regarding femininity defies simple binaries. Having denied that she is a feminist writer,179 Boullosa contends in her interview with Erna Pfeiffer that femininity, in her view, manifests itself in “lo incivilizable”180:

176 In her interview with De Beer, Boullosa affirms, “Todos somos hombre y mujer, todos tenemos una parte de hombre y una parte de mujer, y al escribir un escritor puede optar por usar una de sus dos partes o usar una combinación de las dos. También creo que si sólo se usa el lado de la feminidad, el mundo se vuelve execrable” (“Entrevista” 211). / “We are all men and women, we are all part woman and part man, and by writing, an author can opt to use one of these two parts or to use a combination of the two. I also believe that if only the feminine side is used, the world becomes execrable” (my translation).
177 “sexless, sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, sometimes much of the two, sometimes a little bit of both or neither” (translation my own).
178 Boullosa affirms, “Me impuse como una obligación trabajar con mujeres, porque a mí me gusta ser mujer y pienso que igualmente difícil la pasan los hombres en esta cultura, si no es que la pasan peor. No tienen derecho a un mundo afectivo completo y maduro. Corporalmente tampoco tienen derecho al erotismo. No tienen derecho a muchas cosas los hombres; es un mundo totalmente desigual” (interview with Hind, “Entrevista con Carmen Boullosa” 28). / “I took it upon myself as an obligation to work with women, because I like being a woman and I think that men in this culture also have a difficult, if not worse, time. Men do not have the right to a complete and mature world of affect. Corporally, they also do not have the right to eroticism. Men don't have the right to many things; it is a totally unequal world” (my translation).
179 Clarifying her positions on feminism, Boullosa adds, “Puedo entender que para la vida cotidiana las mujeres necesitamos todavía tomar posiciones feministas para defendernos, y a veces tomar posiciones masculinistas para defender también la intimidad del hombre, que es un espacio asediado y bombardeado
[Lo]o femenino, según me parece, no es lo dulce, sentimental, doméstico, confortable y lindo; lo femenino que me interesa es el lado oculto de la feminidad, lo salvaje, lo indomesticable, la oscura ley del cuerpo, lo incivilizable del hombre y la mujer o lo que la civilización ha dejado al lado de las palabras, al margen de la moral. Así sí me interesa ser una autora femenina. De otra manera honestamente no tengo ningún interés, aunque tampoco tengo otra arma. Soy mujer, escribo desde mi cuerpo y desde mi memoria. Pero procuro pulir mi ‘feminidad’ asalvajándola. (“Procuro pulir mi ‘feminidad’ asalvajándola” 39)

In Texas, the two female characters studied here defy societal expectations regarding proper gender roles, “asalvajando” (making wild) their femininity, to use Boullosa’s term, in order to contest the strictures that would relegate them to peripheral or secondary roles. By questioning meta-narratives through its fragmentation and interplay of multiple discourses, Texas disturbs the boundaries of legitimate citizenship in the borderlands and

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180 Writing with regards to the market implications, in Mexico, of identifying one’s text as women-centered, Anna Marie Sandoval clarifies, “Because of the general impression of women’s writing, particularly feminist writing, many Mexicana writers do not refer to their work as feminist-based, although often the writing is women-centered and critical of capitalist patriarchy” (Toward a Latina Feminism of the Americas 46).
181 “What is feminine, as it seems to me, isn’t the sweet, sentimental, domestic, comfortable, and pretty; what interests me is the dark side of femininity, the wild, the undomesticated, the dark law of the body, the uncivilized parts of men and women or what society has left beyond words, at the margin of morals. So in that respect I am interested in being a feminine author. If it were any other way I honestly wouldn’t have an interest, although I also don’t have any other weapon. I am a woman, I write from within body and from within my memory. But I seek to polish my femininity by making it wild” (my translation).
affirms a racial and binational heterogeneity that problematizes questions of national Anglo male identity.  

IV. Juan Nepomuceno Cortina: Masculine Myth, Revered Rebel

IV.A. Historical Backdrop

In the history of the Texas-Mexico borderlands, few individuals have attracted as much praise and antipathy as Juan Nepomuceno Cortina (1824-1892). Viewed alternately as a folk-hero by Mexicans and a bandit by Americans, Nepomuceno spearheaded a number of racially motivated border raids in 1859 and 1860, resulting in the deaths of fifteen Americans and eight Mexicans, and concluding only after the intervention of U.S. troops and the Texas Rangers’ illegal border-crossing campaign to capture him (Martínez, Troublesome Border 92-5). Historian Jerry D. Thompson remarks that Nepomuceno “became one of the first Mexicans in Texas to strike back at a racist society many Tejanos considered evil,” adding that “many Mexicans in Matamoros and along the border sympathized with Cortina and privately cheered him” (Cortina 45). Later aided by hundreds of native tejanos and Mexicans from nearby Tamaulipas, Nepomuceno initiated the “Cortina War” against United States forces and Texas Rangers, ending with

182 Writing with regards to post-revolutionary Mexico, scholar Jean Franco writes, “The problem of national identity was thus presented primarily as a problem of male identity, and it was male authors who debated its effects and psychoanalyzed the nation” (Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico 131).
183 Jerry D. Thompson writes, “To many of the desperately poor, politically manipulated, and economically abused along the river, he was a savior straight from heaven, a high-stepping border caudillo (military leader) who would restore their pride and dignity, abolish the evils of Anglo-American barristers shenanigans, and restore Mexican authority north to the Nueces River and perhaps beyond” (“Juan Nepomuceno: Border Caudillo Extraordinaire” 18).
184 In his discussion of the effects of Cortina’s insurrectionary actions, David Montejano affirms that “the whole country from Brownsville to Rio Grande City” lay in waste after the ‘Cortina War’, adding that “[b]usiness as far up as Laredo, 240 miles, had been interrupted and suspended for five months. There remained no property belonging to Americans that had not been destroyed” (Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas 33).
his arrest and subsequent court-martial in 1875. In *Texas*, Boullosa narratizes these conflicts from a masculinist scope, incorporating different views about Nepomuceno and forcing readers to interrogate his contentious status (folk hero vs. bandit) and the legitimacy of the Anglo male code that upholds the region’s new socio-economic system.

In addition to examining the discourses that disparage Mexicans, the author also explores the material conditions that advance these antagonisms since the factors that prompted Nepomuceno’s rebellion are many and span several decades. Historian Oscar Martínez affirms that while the initial border raids responded to the “mistreatment of a former family servant and the hanging of a friend” (*Troublesome Border* 92), Nepomuceno’s military experiences also informed his later actions, likely leaving an indelibly negative impression regarding Anglo colonizers who embodied what Gloria Anzaldúa terms “the fiction of white superiority” by “seiz[ing] complete political power [and] stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it” (*Borderlands* 29). It thus comes as little surprise that Boullosa tackles the region’s colonial legacy in economic terms since the “economic conquest of South Texas quickly followed the political takeover and involved the rapid loss of land in the area by Mexican and Mexican American rancheros”. The historical Nepomuceno functions as a particularly fitting conduit for Boullosa’s narrative critique of the borderland power

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186 In regard to Mexico’s forfeiting over half of its national territory to the United States, Jerry D. Thompson argues that Nepomuceno “curse[d] and ridicule[d]” the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (*Cortina* 17), adding, “The triumph of Manifest Destiny and the accompanying racial contempt of the victor for the vanquished at times became endurable as the heroic and patriotic Mexican guerrilla was expected to become a docile and law-abiding citizen of Texas. At age twenty-four, Cortina realized his future was to be shaped by alien political, social, and economic forces” (17).
structures at the birth of the modern-day border. For one, Nepomuceno’s own family suffered the “aggressiveness and duplicity of the Anglos in seeking to obtain land that had belonged to the local people for generations, some even dating back to the Spanish colonial days” (Martínez, Troublesome Border 92). Perhaps more importantly, though, his contentious status--one that emerges along racial lines--allows her to probe the history of the mid nineteenth-century Lower Rio Grande Valley in order to expose, and deconstruct, the region’s colonial legacy of Anglo male power.

IV.B. “le temen los cobardes y sueñan con él las mujeres”: Nepomuceno as a Counter-Hegemonic Male Leader

In his study of the literary representation of Mexican masculinities, Robert McKee Irwin affirms that “[s]ince nationhood is frequently constructed as a ‘virile’ institution, a brotherhood of men,” it is important to approach “[m]asculinity and male sexuality [as] key components of national identity constructions” (Mexican Masculinities xvii, xiii). In Texas, Boullosa narrativizes Mexican masculinity construction as subordinate in an Anglo-dominated economic and political hierarchy. It comes as little surprise that, in the opening pages of the novel, readers witness the violent interaction between Juan Cortina Nepomuceno and Sheriff Shears as the latter attempts to arrest a Mexican man, Lázaro, whose public intoxication has attracted the unwanted attention of Anglo authorities.¹⁸⁸ Unsuccessful in his attempts to arrest Nepomuceno’s friend, Shears

¹⁸⁸ In his article concerning the origins of Mexican machismo in border corridos, folklorist Américo Paredes argues that the interaction between Mexicans and armed Anglos influenced the representation of Mexican masculinity. He cites Juan Nepomuceno as one example: “[T]he border Mexican was a man with a pistol in this hand by the end of the 1850s. In 1859, when Juan Nepomuceno Cortina rebelled against North American authority in Texas, he did so after a shootout with a North American city marshal who had beaten one of his mother's farmhands. From Cortina on, the protagonists of the border corrido are men ‘pistol in hand.’ That is to say, they fight ‘American style’” (“The United States, Mexico and ‘Machismo’” 30). Paredes concludes that “[t]here is no evidence that machismo (in the exaggerated forms that have been studied and condemned in Mexicans) even existed in Mexico before the Revolution. Available evidence
uses the racial epithet “grasiento pelado” (greasy low-life) to insult his Mexican foe, prompting Nepomuceno to shoot Shears in retaliation. How the Mexican and American characters face off here advances the novel’s initial tension, and readers are immediately forced to navigate a number of conflicting discourses that, however partial and incomplete, nonetheless elucidate the biases immanent to each social sector. Throughout, Boullosa prioritizes Nepomuceno’s contentious status, emphasizing how characters’ disparate views of this figure respond in large part to their own race or gender identities.

Stylistically, Boullosa’s representation of time as non-linear and her sudden shift in characters’ dialogues corroborate the novel’s representation of reality as partial, discursively constructed, and contingent upon characters’ consciousness of racial hierarchies and gender proclivities. This is made immediately apparent for the reader in the opening pages, when the Anglo characters interpret Sheriff Shears’s racial epithet as a much-needed affirmation of Mexicans’ alleged inferiority, while the characters of Mexican descent understand it as a reflection of Anglos’ self-prescribed exceptionalism. Alert readers notice the novel’s masculinist scope early: conflict emerges first between three men, and is sustained throughout the narrative almost entirely by male characters who laud violence for different agendas. In fact, it is only at the conclusion of the novel when readers learn that a separate crisis in masculine performance prompted the beginning of the conflict altogether. Readers learn that Lázaro participated in a barroom...
drinking game with Anglo men in order to establish “quién era más hombre” (Texas 235) after his Anglo competitor had insulted him, in broken-Spanish, by claiming that he was not somehow man enough (234). Lázaro makes a concerted effort to abate his anxiety by establishing Mexican masculinity as viable and legitimate, thereby conducing the novel’s initial conflict.

As readers progress, they understand the dual admiration and contempt for Nepomuceno as reflective of the region’s racial antipathies and competing gender codes, even if the true history of the character himself remains largely shrouded in mystery and hearsay. In fact, characters and readers alike are forced to piece together fragments of Nepomuceno’s life story that emerge from different sources. Early in part one, it is suggested that the protagonist was a gifted cattleman at an early age (Texas 55), and that only after being captured by Comanches is he able to become a more orderly and diligent man. Toward the end of the second part, however, it is rumored that the protagonist was captured as a child and raised by Apaches, who viewed the region’s land as belonging to no one and who instilled within him an ethics of rebellion (276). Regardless, the power of Nepomuceno’s appeal among other Mexicans is configured in masculine terms early in part one: “Nepomuceno es leyenda viva. Sus historias de vaquero, de robavacas, de joven muy rico, de mujeriego, de hábil con el lazo como nadie, de guerrero, lo hacen leyenda viva, no en balde le temen los cobardes y sueñan con él las mujeres” (61-2). The

190 “who was more of a man” (my translation).
191 “Nepomuceno is a living legend. His stories as a cowboy, as a cattle thief, as a young rich man, as a womanizer, as someone skilled with a lasso like no one else, as a warrior, make him a living legend, not in vain do cowards fear him and women dream of him” (my translation).
protagonist’s impressive, albeit nebulous, background qualifies him as a nearly mythical figure, while his skills in the public sphere corroborate his masculine standing.\footnote{Nepomuceno’s time among Native Americans is crucial in many respects with regards to how he is viewed by other characters of Mexican descent. As mentioned earlier, one folk tale purports that Nepomuceno was kidnapped and raised by Apaches, that “lo de indio” (the Indian part) never left him, and that because of this early influence, he has made many friends and enemies (272). This later proves advantageous, as we shall see, when he tries to form a coalition of Mexicans and Native Americans against the Anglo men (276-7). How the Native Americans themselves are viewed likewise defies simple dichotomization. The Comanches are a case in point. While many Mexicans fear their attacks, Elizabeth Stealman (wife to Charles) privately admires their influence on Sam Houston: “Conozco un comanche, el hoy gobernador mister Houston, y él es, comparado con mi Charles, un auténtico caballero!” (“I know a comanche, the current governor Mr. Houston, and he is, compared to my Charles, an authentic gentleman”) (258 my translation).}  

In spite—or perhaps because of—the illusory nature of Nepomuceno’s history, the novel’s other Mexican men extol him, follow his lead, and often correlate the virtue of his cause with the virility of his person. Halfway through part one, for example, the character Santiago openly admires Nepomuceno, drawing parallels between successful leadership and male anatomy: “¡Éste sí que es hombre! ... ¡Eso es tener tanates, y bien grandotes!” (Texas 138).\footnote{“This is what it means to be a man! This is what it means to have big balls!” (my translation).} Still, the protagonist’s appeal goes far beyond physical qualifiers. The homosocial collective that Nepomuceno spearheads in opposition to Anglo capitalists foregrounds the rectifying of racialized injustices as a marker of Mexican masculine performance. This is confirmed through the testimony of Fernando, whom the narrator represents as being “más dueño de sí” and “más puesto en el mundo” only after joining Nepomuceno’s cause: “Ya no es mosquito que se aleje al primer porrazo” (270).\footnote{“More in charge of himself” ... “better-informed in the world” ... “He is no longer a mosquito who flees the first blow” (my translation).}

The protagonist’s mythic status, agility with women, claims to land ownership, success as a cattle rancher, and commitment to land reform all work to qualify him as a counter-hegemonic male presence in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, in stark opposition to the region’s leading Anglo entrepreneurs.
Just as the novel presents its readers with a region whose governance is contested by competing groups of men—one Anglo, the other Mexican, each espousing different conceptions of masculinity—it also highlights the divergences that take place within these groups. The case of Nepomuceno and his followers attests to such dynamics. Rather than reduce the complexities of borderland conflict to simple binaries of “us” and “them”, *Texas* explores the construction of Mexican masculinities in the wake of Anglo conquest and how Nepomuceno in particular invokes place, belonging, and a reticent call to physical violence as corollaries to affirming one’s manhood and, by extension, securing the privileges of citizenship.

**IV.C. Topographies of Resistance: Crossing Borders, Undoing Race, and Reclaiming Citizenship**

Borders, figurative and literal, appear frequently throughout *Texas*. The characters—Mexican, Anglo, male, female—grapple with the compulsions of gender proclivities and national allegiances, while also striving to uphold or resist a moral economy that emerges from a racialized ideology of capitalist expansion. A writer who uses historical backdrops to interrogate dominant historical narratives, Boullosa is conscious of the complexities characterizing the region, and as such, she refrains from advancing facile dichotomies regarding Mexican-Anglo antagonisms. In fact, the early representation of the physical border affirms as much, reminding readers that Anglo immigrants arrived by invitation from the Mexican government, even if the former failed to uphold the long-term stipulations of the latter: “Para proteger la frontera norte de la voracidad europea y de los indios guerreros, el gobierno federal mexicano invitó a americanos a poblarlas. Les prestó tierras o se las dio condicionadas y a algunos también cabezas de ganado. Para dejar los puntos claros, les hizo firmar contratos en que juraban
ser católicos y ser leales al gobierno mexicano” (*Texas* 12). The author immediately qualifies the novel’s emergent conflict in racial terms, reminding readers that Anglos were not allowed to import slaves into Tejas (then a Mexican territory), and that the declaration of Texas as an independent republic responded in large part to this disjuncture in competing racial politics. The author thematizes the encroachment of a capitalist market in critical terms: buffalo are nearly exterminated, the formation of pastures invalidates antecedent land claims, and the United States government, for economic and political expediency, moves the border from its original site at the Rio Nueces to the more geographically advantageous Rio Grande. Boullosa’s critique is a timely one, reminding readers that here, “the advance of capitalism demands ruins,” to borrow Fredrick B. Pike’s phrase (*The United States and Latin America* 122), but more importantly that the alleged thieves and malefactors at the birth of the modern-day border were not, in fact, the Mexicans, but rather the Anglos. 

Boullosa’s interrogation of the region’s power dynamics along economic, racial, and gender lines responds in large part to the historical convergence of all three against the backdrop of territorial expansion. Even so, the author goes further, exploring how these axes coalesce and problematize questions of legitimate citizenship for those, like Nepomuceno, who suffer the consequences of Mexico’s territorial concessions.

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195 “In order to protect the northern border from European voracity and warrior Indians, the federal Mexican government invited Americans to populate them. It loaned them lands or the lands were given on conditions, and to some were given heads of cattle. In order to make their points clear, it made them sign contracts in which they swore to become Catholic and to be loyal to the Mexican government” (my translation).

196 In his study on Texas folklore entitled *With His Pistol in His Hand* (originally published in 1958), Américo Paredes echoes a similar sentiment with regards to the Anglo colonization of Texas: “The ‘cattle barons’ built up their fortunes at the expense of the Border Mexican by means which were far from ethical. One notes that the white Southerner took his slave women as concubines and then created an image of the male Negro as a sex fiend. In the same way he appears to have taken the Mexican’s property and then made him out a thief” (*With His Pistol in His Hand* 20).
Boullosa’s text functions as an intervention, one that ultimately problematizes the claims of Anglo historians, such as those of J. Frank Dobie, who regarded Nepomuceno as little more than a contemptible bandit. The author accomplishes this in large part through the interacting and conflicting discourses that permeate the novel. At the halfway point of part one, for example, Boullosa disavows Anglo exceptionalism by privileging Nepomuceno’s critical monologue, which assures readers that his defiant insurgency responds to a number of injustices at the hands of Anglo immigrants. 197

¡Se atreven a decirme a mí, Nepomuceno, que soy un ladrón de ganado! ¡Cuántas cabezas me arrebataron a mí los recién venidos, los que se creen mucho porque hicieron la República Independiente de Texas!—¡son unos frescos!, ¡quesque hicieron una república!, ¿qué se puede esperar de gente que tiene por primer principio la defensa de la esclavitud? ¡texanos!—, luego los Yankees que se nos vinieron a pegar con eso de la anexión, convencidos de que aquí había negocio rápido—arrebatarnos tierras, ganado, minas,—por no hablar de que luego nos comerían del Río Nueces hasta el Río Bravo—¡nos birlaron el territorio!, porque bien mirado, ¿cuál compra?, ¿cuál guerra?, por más que le den a la hilacha fue hurto—. Yo soy el último de la lista a quien pueden colgarle ese sambenito ... A fin de cuentas, el llano es quien alimenta a los animales, al llano pertenecen, y el que sea bueno con el lazo tiene el derecho de llevárselos, si sabe que contribuye a

197 Regarding the motivating factors behind the Cortina raids, Oscar J. Martínez affirms the following: “Important battles were fought near his home, and atrocities were committed in nearby settlements. The memory of the war and the continuous despoliation of tejanos thus contributed to his animosity toward Anglos” (Troublesome Border 92).
la siembra de cabezas. Ése era el orden, antes que llegaran éstos y pusieran sus
leyes muy como les plazca.’ (author’s emphasis 118-19)\(^{198}\)

Readers notice an important contrast in the deployment of power, where the masculine feats of Nepomuceno (his management of cattle and his talents with “el lazo”) are counterpoised by the obscure juridical apparatus of Anglo men. Boullosa carefully links race to these operations, and she does so for good reason. Just as the historical record attests to the “Mexican” race as a political byproduct and permeable taxonomy, Boullosa thematizes the convergence of whiteness with the political machinations informing legitimate citizenship. Considered jointly, the cultural understandings of race between Anglos and Mexicans illuminate a stark contrast regarding how each group has traditionally viewed race.

In his study of anti-Latino/a stereotypes that have persisted throughout United States history, Frederick Pike argues that whereas many Latin Americans have “hailed actual race mixture as a means of producing a ‘cosmic race,’” many in the United States have preferred cultural over racial mixing\(^{199}\)--that is, if any such integration is to take place at all (\textit{The United States and Latin America} 39).\(^{200}\) Pike explains that during the

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\(^{198}\) “They dare to tell me, Nepomuceno, that I am a cattle thief! How many heads [of cattle] have the newcomers, those who think a lot of themselves because they made the Republic of Texas, taken from me? They’re a shameless bunch! That they made a republic! What can be expected of a people who have as their first principle the defense of slavery? Texans!--then, the Yankees that came to beat us with annexation, convinced that here there would be quick business--take our land, cattle, mines--not to even mention that they would eat us up from Nueces River to the Rio Grande--they stole our land from us!, because looked at closely, what purchase? what war? No matter how much they get carried away, it was theft”--I am the last in this list on whom they can hang this stigma. After all, the country is that which feeds the animals, they belong to the plain, and he who is good with the lasso has the right to take them away from it, if he knows that he contributes to the sowing of heads [of cattle]. This was the order, before those [Anglos] arrived and put their laws however they wanted” (my translation).

\(^{199}\) Here, Pike is indirectly referencing José Vasconcelos, whose theoretical “raza cósmica” (cosmic race) hailed the benefits of miscegenation. For more information, see Vasconcelos’s \textit{La raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana, Argentina y Brasil}.

\(^{200}\) This is not to say that cultural adaptation does not entail a series of potential abuses and foreclosures. In their discussion of recent immigration trends from Mexico to the U.S., scholars Laura Velasco Ortiz and
nineteenth century, biological miscegenation was “associated with inevitable retrogression, with debasement rather than invigoration of the civilized person’s gifts” (39). Such ideas were never entirely separated from the belief in Anglo cultural and political superiority, on the one hand, and the concomitant call of westward expansion, on the other. As historian Reginald Horsman contends in 1981 study of Manifest Destiny, “To keep Caucasian blood pure was to ensure the continuation of civilization and progress” (*Race and Manifest Destiny* 130) while U.S. westward expansion would, accordingly, operate “for the absolute good of the world” (218). In *Caballero*, we recall, whiteness operates as a participatory medium for capitalist citizenship, an imperfect medium that would appeal to Anglo readers while nevertheless allowing its co-authors to advance a more syncretic vision of the post-Guadalupe Hidalgo borderlands. In *Blood Meridian*, whiteness functions both as a catalyst for American exceptionalism and as a metric that allows Anglo men to accumulate capital through scalphunting. In *Texas*, Boullosa casts whiteness as a pre-requisite for citizenship and cultural legitimacy, but more importantly as a necessity male political and economic power.  

The Anglo male characters in *Texas* strive to maintain political and economic power in the region, but they can do so only by ignoring what historian Richard Slotkin has called “the perilous consequences of capitalist development in the New World” (*The Fatal Environment* 47). This should come as no surprise, though, when considered in conjunction with how the novel’s capitalist male code emerges from and reinforces the region’s coloniality of Özscar F. Contreras remind us that “[t]he process of cultural blending takes place in a horizon of subordinate ethnic and racial relations and processes of exploitation, exclusion and expulsion” (“The Border as a Life Experience” 43).

201 Richard Slotkin echoes a similar position regarding the historical record: “[T]here was widespread agreement, except among committed abolitionist egalitarians, that the colored races were unfit for citizenship; and that to prepare the Mexican for citizenship would require that the Negro and Indian likewise be admitted as equals ... The great source of Anglo-Saxon strength, according to most accounts, was its exclusivity, its refusal to mingle its blood with that of lesser races” (*The Fatal Environment* 188).
power, or as Slotkin himself elaborates regarding the Mexican-American War: “the
tendency of ideological argument was toward the representation of Mexico as a unitary
racial antagonist, rather than as a dark mirror image of the class divisions in republican
society. This permitted the portrayal of the Spanish as a renegade class worthy of
extermination or expulsion, and the Mexicans proper as a nation fit for racial
subservience” (Fatal Environment 180). Texas foregrounds Anglo masculinity
performance along the axes of whiteness and capital accumulation, but it counterpoises
these constructions by highlighting how Mexican men construct and perform their male
codes by attempting to regain territorial governance and legitimate their own political
rights and cultural frameworks.202

In fact, the Anglo characters’ reification of whiteness as part of their masculine
performances allows the characters of color (male and female alike) to strategically
oppose this framework through collective resistance. Francisco Manuel Sánchez de
Tagle, for one, sends a letter to José María, suggesting that fugitive Mexico-bound slaves
from the United States should stay at the border so that they can fight American
filibusters (Texas 59). In part one, Nepomuceno himself proposes a coalition between
Mexicans and Native Americans (143), and much later reiterates this call in part two,
where he hopes to recruit at least one representative from each of the five Native
American pueblos to his cause (276). Time and again, Boullosa privileges the racial and
cultural heterogeneity of the borderlands, casting them as potentially combative elements
to the capitalist enterprise spearheaded by men like Charles Steelman:

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202 Juan Gonzalez notes, the Mexican government abolished slavery in Texas in 1829 “in the hopes of
cutting off economic incentives for southerners to emigrate” (Harvest of Empire 41).
El Río Bravo divide al mundo en dos categorías, puede que hasta en tres o en más. No hay afán de decir que en una sola están todos los gringos, en otro los mexicanos, en su aparte los indios salvajes, en otra los negros y ya luego los hijos de puta. Las categorías no son cerradas. En la Apachería hay indios diversos que no se entienden entre ellos, de costumbres diferentes, empujados a la brava ahí por los gringos, negros de muchas lenguas, sus costumbres diversas, no todos los gringos son ladrones, ni todos los mexicanos santos o bondadosos, en cada división hay géneros revueltos. Sin embargo, sí hay que dar por hecho que el Río Bravo marca una línea que pesa y vale: al norte empieza la Gran Pradería, y del sur en adelante el mundo vuelve a ser lo que es, la Tierra, con sus diferencias.

The narrator assures readers that long before and shortly after the birth of the modern day border, fixed categories (racial, geographical, linguistic, and sexual) do not hold. Still, in spite of this heterogeneous interplay of people, cultures, and languages, the imposition of a racialized “overculture”, to again use Patricia Penn-Hilden’s term (“How the Border Lies” 163), promotes and maintains a seat of hegemony for those at the head of its economic and juridical apparatus. How the Mexican male characters navigate space

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203 “The Río Grande divides the world into two categories, maybe even three or more. There’s no eagerness in saying that in one there are all gringos, in another the Mexicans, in another one apart the wild Indians, in another the negros and then all the other sons of bitches. Categories are not closed off. In the Apacheria there are diverse Indians that aren’t even understood amongst themselves, those of different customs, pushed whether they like it or not by the gringos, negros of many tongues, their different customs, not all gringos are thieves, nor are all Mexican saints or kind-hearted, in each division there are mixed-up kinds. However, if one must give as a fact that the Rio Grande marks a line that weighs and is worth something: to the north begins the great grasslands (la Gran Pradería), and to the south and beyond the world returns to being what it is, the Earth, with its differences” (my translation).

204 In her representation of borderlands sexuality, Boulosa makes clear that homosexuality was a common practice in the region before the arrival of Anglos (Texas 49). The compulsions of heteronormativity nonetheless take root, as evidenced in the anxieties of the novel’s two homosexual Anglo men, Rick and Chris, each of whom fears the violence that they would incur should the community learn of their sexual orientation (Texas 221).
further calls attention to their concerted acts of resistance under the direction of Nepomuceno. In part one, readers learn that the protagonist must avoid his mother’s ranch, located north of the border, and must plan his group’s opposition elsewhere. The narrator elaborates:

Hubiera preferido dirigirse a su propio rancho, pero conoce el ánimo vengativo de los gringos, debe encontrar resguardo que no ponga en riesgo a su gente. Por el momento sabe que no puede ir ahí, ni acercarse a alguno de los ranchos de su mamá ... Tiene que cruzar la frontera, prepararse del otro lado para enfrentar a los rangers. Si no, lo van a hacer pinole. (Texas 143)

Here, Mexican territory functions as a space of resistance, while the border, in turn, emerges as a gateway for collective action, rather than a simple demarcation between two once embattled nation states. Indeed, as a contentious site of transgression and combative insurgency, the border here corresponds to the insights of sociocultural anthropologist Alejandro Lugo, who contends that “the border region ... can erode the hegemony of the privileged center by denationalizing and deterritorializing the nation/state” (“Reflections on Border Theory, Culture, and the Nation” 45). Elsewhere, Nepomuceno disregards the legitimacy of borders altogether, as when he frequently trespasses Anglo property: “a Nepomuceno no le importa meterse en las llamas de los

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205 “He would have preferred going to his own ranch, but he knows the vindictive spirit of the gringos, he should find shelter that doesn’t put his people at risk. At the moment he knows that he can not go there, nor can he get close to one of his mother’s ranches ... He has to cross the border, prepare himself from the other side in order to confront the rangers. If not, they're going to grind him up into pinole” (my translation).

206 In her short essay regarding the different racial politics between the U.S. and Mexico in the nineteenth century, Boullosa reminds us, “Los desesperados no eran latinoamericanos tras el ‘Sueño Americano,’ sino esclavos huyendo por alcanzar su libertad, por acceder a la solidaridad y la protección (física y legal) de una nación hermana. México era la Tierra Prometida” (“El Sueño Mexicano” 37). / “The Mexican Dream” ... “The hopeless weren’t Latin Americans after the ‘American Dream,’ but rather slaves fleeing in order to achieve their liberty, by accessing the solidarity and (fiscal and legal) protection of a sister nation. Mexico was the Promised Land” (my translation).
Throughout the narrative, Boullosa is careful to link the characters’ maneuvering of space to the social construction of race. The confrontation between Nepomuceno and Salustio confirms as much. Taking place in part two, the dialogue here best underscores Nepomuceno’s insistence in reclaiming their collective rights to American citizenship in spite of his followers’ confusing such motives with Anglo sympathies. One of Nepomuceno’s key allies in the rebellion, Salustio confronts his leader with this accusation: “‘Te tragas ésa de ser gringo y estás fundido, te quedas allá para ser como un negro en su tierra, no hay otra con ellos. Te van a usar para hacerse ricos. Su dólar es blanco’” (Texas 288). Salustio’s fidelity to “La Raza” proves especially ironic, for it is, in fact, the Anglo characters’ own racial fidelity that disenfranchises their Mexican counterparts. Nepomuceno instead prefers to identify himself with the more inclusive marker “norteamericano” (North American)––a move that garners swift opposition from Salustio, who responds, “‘No podemos llamarnos norteaericanos, Nepomuceno, ¿Te das cuenta? Para mí sería firmar que acepto la esclavitud propia y de mis iguales. No. Yo soy mexicano, de acá de este lado. Es la única carta que tengo, mi protección’” (287). Whereas nineteenth-century Anglo men often conceptualized the frontier as a feminine entity to be conquered––a process that in turn demonstrated one’s virility and masculine

207 “It didn’t bother Nepomuceno to get involved in the flames of the Texans. They had stolen his mother’s property by making big legal traps so that they could build Brownsville, buying up what wasn’t even theirs” (my translation).
208 “If you swallow this being a gringo thing, you’re done. You’ll be there just like a negro is in their land. There’s no other way. They’re going to use you to make themselves rich. Their dollar is white” (my translation).
209 “North American” … “We can’t call ourselves ‘North American’, Nepomuceno. Don’t you realize? For me it would be signing that I accept my own slavery and the slavery of my equals. No. I am Mexican, from this side here. This is the only card that I have, my protection” (my translation).
standing--Nepomuceno qualifies questions of manhood in terms of a citizenship ideal that disavows racial binaries, and a concept of geography that questions the legitimacy of imposed borders.210

By refusing to thematize in simple binaries the issues of race and citizenship, the text dismantles the primacy of the Anglo male characters’ claims to power by privileging the counter-hegemonic strategies of its Mexican-American protagonist. By affirming his American citizenship in spite of his rebellion, and by ultimately invoking the identity marker “norteamericano” (Northamerican) over the more separatist “La Raza” (the Race), Nepomuceno seeks to remedy the wrongs committed against individuals of color. At the same time, he fights back by reappropriating stolen territory and asserting the legitimacy of his followers’ claims--a process that further corroborates his status as “leyenda viva” (living legend) (61). By representing Nepomuceno accordingly, the text compromises the validity of the Anglo male characters’ juridical claims and economic rationales, positing both as mechanisms of a larger colonial framework. These counter-hegemonic interventions disturb the legitimacy of the Anglo males’ regime of power by creating a discursive space for the enunciation of formerly marginal voices, without leaving Anglos out of this same heterogeneous border milieu.211

210 Writing in regards to the continental expansion and Anglo masculinities, David Pugh writes, “Continental expansion and conquest coupled with industrialism and the triumphs of technology had provided nineteenth-century men their raisons d’être, their motivations and rationalizations for slaughtering the Indian, ravaging the land, and using the wilderness as a proving ground for WASP male supremacy (Sons of Liberty xviii). Amy S. Greenburg makes similar comments: “Elevated by his uniform, military status, and Anglo-Saxon racial identity, the foot solider of aggressive expansionism could participate in the regeneration, through violence, of both the new frontier and himself” (Manifest Manhood 151).

211 Boulosa’s representation of Nepomuceno in these terms is consonant with the historical record. As Oscar Martínez notes, “Despite his problems with Anglo-Texans, Cortina had faith in the American government and expressed a desire to make it work for all its people, particularly tejanos” (Troublesome Border 93).
While *Texas* is not entirely a novel about men, the narrative tension that underpins the trajectories of the characters studied here stems in large part from the deployment of male-enacted violence as a calculated resource for the specific gains of these two competing groups: Mexicans and those of Mexican descent, who seek the validation of their land claims, versus Anglos, who promote capitalist expansion and retain a racially exclusive vision of citizenship. In his oft-cited study of colonialism, race, and the psychological dimensions of retributive violence, psychiatrist Frantz Fanon proposes, “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 9); and in his preface to the same study, existentialist philosopher Jean Paul-Sartre contends that when a colonized people resort to violence, “they recover their lost coherence [and] experience self-knowledge through reconstruction of themselves” ("Preface" lv). These observations strongly correspond to the ways in which the male characters of Mexican descent in *Texas* strategically employ physical violence against the Anglo men who retain economic and political hegemony in the contested region. By spearheading his rebellion and the heterogeneous vision of citizenship that it takes as its base, Nepomuceno structures his identity as a “norteamericano” (neither exclusively Mexican nor American), and recuperates an understanding of himself that the cultural overreach of Anglos had worked to alienate and fragment. The interlocking categories of race and gender, of course, are never far

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212 In her book examining race and labor in the construction of legitimate citizenship during the nineteenth century, gender and women’s studies scholar Evelyn Nakano Glenn proposes, “Citizenship has been used to draw boundaries between those who are included as members of the community and entitled to respect, protection, and rights and those who are excluded and thus not entitled to recognition and rights. Labor places people in the economic order, affecting access to goods and services, level of autonomy, standard of living, and quality of life. Both have been constituted in ways that privilege white men and give them power over racialized minorities and women. Simultaneously, citizenship and labor have been arenas in which groups have contested their exclusion, oppression, and exploitation” (*Unequal Freedom* 1).
removed from this process. Writing with regard to the latter half of the nineteenth-century, historian Sarah Deutsch affirms as much:

In a sense the violent western conflicts over resources were ‘race wars,’ in which ‘race’ connoted more than biological composition ... [A] certain set of attributes, including race, constituted virtue and civilization. These attributes included Protestant individualism, female domesticity, and male enterprise, all of which fed the large-scale capitalism and commercial development that were considered the source of future opportunities. Sexuality and private property were intimately related in this Anglo pantheon. Manliness itself depended on land ownership and domination. ‘Otherness’ lay in the gender and labor structures of Chinese immigrants, the communalism of Hispanic villages, the power and autonomy of Indian women and their hunting men. (“Landscape of Enclaves” 113)

In Texas, Boullosa narrativizes the Mexican-Anglo conflict in similar terms, exploring how dominant notions of race and gender superiority condition the rights of citizenship and property ownership. In fact, though the novel is not exclusively about Mexican women, Boullosa both represents the subordinated status of the Mexican female characters to Mexican men, while also privileging one Mexican woman, doña Estefanía, whose skills and acumen rival those of her (Mexican and Anglo) male peers.

Whereas much Mexican literature from the nineteenth-century often depicted Mexican masculinity as “an imagined community of Mexican brothers” with little attention given to class distinction,²¹³ Boullosa represents the construction of Mexican

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²¹³ With regards to nineteenth-century Mexican literature and its representation of masculinities, Robert McKee Irwin contends that “[i]ssues of social class did not quite entangle themselves with questions of masculinity yet. Upper-class men were hombres de bien; lower-class men were muy hombres; all were masculine, at least until the century’s end” (Mexican Masculinities xxxi). Irwin adds that “[c]oncerns with
masculinity through what Robert McKee Irwin understands as an integrationist scope symptomatic of the borderlands. With regards to the representation of Mexican masculinity in Mexican border literature, Irwin writes:

Border texts define Mexicanness through cultural contrast with the United States. Interestingly, in the context of the U.S.-Mexican border, masculinity is again a focus, and the erosics of both idealized hypermasculinity and male homosocial bonding clearly come into play in the context of a Mexican masculinity that must define and assert itself not in terms of racial purity or mestizaje, but in terms of national difference and contemporary power struggles in North America. Once again, integration, that is, unification now across borders, is allegorized through male homosocial bonding. \textit{(Mexican Masculinities xxxv)}

In \textit{Caballero}, however, the Mexican men emphasize both their “racial purity” and their “national difference” as markers of their masculinities and alleged superiority to Anglo men. In \textit{Blood Meridian}, the Mexican men remain silent in these matters. In fact, the men of one Mexican pueblo contracts the Anglo scalphunting expedition for protection from Native Americans, offering no indication that their mestizaje and national belonging supersede the necessity of survival. In \textit{Texas}, however, these “contemporary power struggles” take center stage. Rather than represent violence as a vacuous feature of the borderlands, \textit{Texas} represents violence (physical and economic) as a masculine resource that the male characters manage in order either to assert their standing as “man enough” or to counter the actions of rival groups and, thus, assert the primacy of their respective imagined communities. Here, readers must question what types of imagined communities social class, race, and nationality become more pronounced and more tightly interlinked with gender rhetoric after the revolution of the 1910s” \textit{(xxxii)}. 

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are at odds, and how conflict emerges and is provisionally resolved through the strategies of these male actors. The manifesto that Nepomuceno and his aid Salustio jointly create attests to how the Mexican men will use physical violence as a tool to strategically oppose the racially-motivated actions of the Anglo men:

Nuestro objetivo ... es castigar la infame avilantez de nuestros enemigos, confabulados para formar una logia inquisitorial y pérfida para perseguirnos y despojarnos de nuestras pertenencias, sin más motivo que ser de origen mexicano. Una multitud de abogados concertados para despojar a los mexicanos de sus tierras y posesiones y para usurparlas de inmediato. (Texas 263)\textsuperscript{214}

Cautiously employed physical violence, understood as a counter-hegemonic masculine resource, allows the Mexican male characters to undertake actions that are understood in conflicting terms: those of Mexican descent largely view these undertakings as virtuous necessities, while their Anglo counterparts mobilize a racialized moral code to justify their own violent efforts against the allegedly rebellious and biologically inferior Mexicans. Aesthetically, Boullosa interpellates different discourses, switching back and forth between the past and the present, and ultimately forcing readers to determine how these cultural, racial, and gender antagonisms emerge in part through heteroglossic interplay. This mixing of discourses has the long-term effect of problematizing Anglos’ claims to superiority, reflecting a cultural and racial heterogeneity that forms the basis of Nepomuceno’s rebellion.

\textsuperscript{214} “Our objective ... is to punish the dreadful insolence of our enemies, conspired to form an inquisitorial and traitor lodge in order to pursue us and strip us of our belongings, without a motive than our being of Mexican origin. A multitude of lawyers concerted to dispossess Mexicans of their land and possessions and to usurp them immediately” (my translation).
It comes as little surprise, then, that Nepomuceno promotes a reticent call to physical violence against key Anglo aggressors, acknowledging their legal and political hegemony without necessarily conceding to it. In part two, the protagonist counters a supporter, Óscar, who contends that their actions should be more aggressive, to the point of eliminating Anglos altogether from the occupied Texas territory: 215

‘Hay que agarrar Brunveille y quitárselos, a fin de cuentas es nuestro ... ¡está en la propiedad de tu mamá, Nepomuceno! ¡tú tienes el título legal! Hasta el fuerte, Nepomuceno, ¡hasta el fuerte!’

‘Pero no se trata de eso. Sólo de pintarles la raya. Están adentro, son parte ya de nuestra tierra, La Raza tiene que hacerles saber que merecemos respeto.’

‘Si no los echamos, antes que nos demos cuenta van a valer la prohibición de que trabajemos al norte del Río Bravo no solamente la peonada, sino cualquier mexicano. Las propiedades ... ya vieron lo que las respetan ... Van a tender una cerca o levantar un muro para que no crucemos a ‘su’ Texas ... ¡como si fuera de ellos! ... nos van a despojar de todo .... Al sur del Río Bravo, todo será violencia. Van a hacer que también haya mexicanos que piensen y sientan como ellos un aborrecimiento por los mexicanos.’

215 In his book *The Making of the Mexican Border: The State, Capitalism, and Society in Nuevo León, 1848-1910*, historian Juan Mora-Torres observes the different views of the border between Mexico and the United States: “For the government in Mexico City, the border represented nothing but a series of new problems that it was incapable of solving: secessionist movements, Indian and Texan raiders, uncontrolled contraband, and all kinds of threatening diplomatic disputes with Washington. For Washington, D.C., the violence at the boundary was simply another indicator of Mexico’s inability to sustain political order ... the new border caused an outflow of commerce and population to Brownsville, Texas” (23).
In her book chapter “The Enemy Outside,” sociologist Nancy J. Chodorow examines how men often translate perceived threats to their social or ethnic collectivities into imminent dangers that likewise threaten their individual identities. Chodorow contends that, “[w]hen social wholes fracture, and identity, via conscious and unconscious concepts of personhood, nation, or ethos, is threatened, for men, especially, gender identity seems to fracture along similar lines. This reinforces the threat to selfhood and leads to ... violence” (256). The decidedly anti-immigrant ideology of Óscar and the Anglo men at large correlates to Chodorow’s insights, but they contrast markedly with the approach undertaken by Nepomuceno. Here, readers notice that rather than reinforce a racialized politics or myopic scope of cultural purism, Nepomuceno’s call to action reaches for an integrationist agenda that both respects the long-term presence of Anglo immigrants and recuperates the territorial claims of the region’s Mexican inhabitants. Later, Nepomuceno clarifies his use of violence accordingly: “No haremos más violencia de la necesaria para hacerles respetar a La Raza ... Iremos con cautela para volver la nuestra una causa de verdadera justicia. Vamos contra los directos responsables, los que nos ofendieron. Tres

216 “You have to grab Brownsville and take it away from them, at the end of the day it’s ours ... This is the property of your mother, Nepomuceno! you have the legal title! Keep strong, Nepomuceno, keep strong! / But it’s not about that. We have to draw a line somewhere. They’re inside, they’re already a part of our land, la Raza has to let them know that we deserve respect / If we don’t throw them out, before you know it they’re not going to let us work north of the Rio Grande, not just poor day laborers but all Mexicans Our properties ... you already saw how they respect those ... They’re going to put up a fence or a wall so that we don’t cross over into ‘their’ Texas ... as if it were even theirs! ... they’re going to take everything away from us ... South of the Rio Grande everything will be violent. They’re going to make it so that there will be Mexicans who think and feel, like they themselves do, a hatred toward other Mexicans. / Go and drink your chocolate, Oscar. You’re talking nonsense” (my translation).
golpes, yo encabezo el primero” (author’s emphasis 293). In the end, these strategies allow the protagonist and his followers to contest the economic and political hegemony of Anglo capitalists, lauding a more heterogeneous and inclusive vision of citizenship that contrasts markedly with that of the Anglo male capitalists, who ultimately squander Nepomuceno’s movement and retain their territorial claims.

V. Charles Stealman: Capitalist Dominance and Anglo Hegemonic Masculinity

V.A. Historical Backdrop

Though the status of Nepomucenos remains a contentious one, accepted history has been much more kind to the character whom Boullosa takes as her antagonist. Historian Marilyn McAdams Sibley describes the historical Stillman as a “[s]hrewd, self-reliant, and commanding” individual, “a Connecticut Yankee by birth” and “foremost” among “[e]nterprising businessmen” since he would go on to become “past master in the intricacies of trade and politics” in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (“Charles Stillman” 228-29). Jerry D. Thompson adds that alongside Richard King and Mifflin Kennedy, Stillman undertook a number of entrepreneurial activities that yielded a considerable profit from his control of riverboat traffic--what Montejano terms “a final demonstration of the meaning of annexation” (Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas 43)--and Stealman’s later endeavors in cross-border smuggling likewise produced a substantial profit (Cortina 24).  

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217 “We won’t do any violence other than what is necessary in order to make them respect La Raza ... We will go with caution in order to make ours a true justice. We’ll go against those directly responsible, those who directly offended us. Three hits, I’m in charage of the first!” (my translation).

218 Writing on this topic, David Montejano adds, “Much of Stillman’s success in business stemmed not just from entrepreneurial talent but from the unusual political ability to maintain ‘good faith’ with the warring sides during the Texas troubles, the Mexican War, and again during the American Civil War” (Anglos and Mexicans 42).
Here, readers of *Texas* should recall that Boullosa’s fiction has often interrogated historical narratives rather than simply affirming them. Time and again in *Texas*, the author critically explores the ill effects of capitalist expansion on the figures ineligible to participate in a capitalist economy that privileges wealth and whiteness, and that offers only a limited scope of citizenship, buttressed by racial qualifiers. The comments of historian John Mack Faragher illustrate how continental expansion helped shape the national imaginary, a process that Boullosa tackles to expose the abuses of this process through the prim of race, masculinity, and economics:

American expansion ... was linked to the development of a national capitalist society. The prevailing ethic of American communities was progress. Indeed, the genius of community formation on the American frontier was the way groups of persistent and mobile people shared a common belief in the values of improvement and expansion—the twin ideological expressions of persistence and mobility. (“Americans, Mexicans, Métis” 105-6)

*Texas* directly links the accumulation of land and the expansion of Anglo society to progress—something that the Mexican characters are allegedly unable to spearhead since, in the view of the Anglo men, their racial miscegenation precludes this endeavor altogether. An opportunist whose actions reflect his commitment to gender and racial superiority, Stealman seeks domination of the region’s resources in partnership with Richard King and Mifflin Kennedy, two other historical Anglo male entrepreneurs. The discourses of these characters also evidence their commitment to what this study posits as the coloniality of male power, and their frequent and racist comments about Mexicans are not without historical antecedents. Thompson reminds us that for many Texas-based
Anglos, “Mexicans were not only racially inferior [but also] cruel, cowardly, and
treacherous” (Cortina 34). In a similar vein, Richard Slotkin contends that with Mexicans
regarded in such appalling terms, Anglos often sanctioned and justified their own
violence as a necessary means to uphold an allegedly superior moral code and its
attendant cultural framework (Fatal Environment 182). In Boullosa’s text, Stealman
himself espouses similar sympathies, commenting that “Texas era la tierra de las grandes
oportunidades, pero tenía un problema: los mexicanos” (Texas 170).²¹⁹ Whiteness and
capital accumulation inform how the Anglo male characters construct their masculinities
and fight for a cultural order that reflects their roles as builders of this (white, male-
dominated) national community.

V.B. Men Manifesting Destinies: Normalizing Discourses of Race and Masculinity

In spite of their distinct occupations and class positions, the Anglo male
characters in Texas reify their masculinities often through discursive ploys that laud the
alleged superiority of an Anglo-Saxon background and its concomitant cultural
privileges. Reginald Horsman reminds us that throughout the nineteenth century, Anglo
men juxtaposed the ideals of Enlightenment progress alongside a quasi-religious
exaltation of Anglo racial preeminency (Race and Manifest Destiny 82-3). This
ideological framework worked to advance westward expansion, for, as Horsman
contends, many Anglos viewed continued territorial acquisition as a sort of a teleological
unfolding “decreed by Providence” (86). Anglo men came to view the largely mestizo
Catholic citizens of the newly independent Mexico as victims of racial and cultural
retrograde, and as a people incapable of taming nature and imposing civilization as their
northern Anglo-Saxon neighbors. Consider, for example, the comments of Elizabeth

²¹⁹ “Texas was the land of great opportunities, but it had one problem: Mexicans” (my translation).
Stealman (wife of Charles) who assures the other Anglo characters present in part one, “Llegamos a estas tierras salvajes con la idea de someter bosques, bestias, y sus habitantes. Trajimos la cultura y la salvación” (Texas 197). To again quote Horsman, many Anglo men viewed physical violence as a licit measure for the advancement of their own cultural frameworks and racial pedigrees: “Along with the exaltation of a particular race came a new sense of urgency and ultimately a willingness to admit the necessity of force” (228) so that the United States’ nation-building agents and political leaders “were ready to take what the Mexicans would not sell. Many had convinced themselves that what they wanted was for the good of the world as well as for themselves” (228). The foregoing remarks concerning race, nationalism, and masculinity prove especially true of Texas, since it was here that male-enacted violence operated against the backdrop of market competition and racial conflict and the related issue of border demarcation.

For many of the Anglo characters in Texas, the Mexicans constitute a racially sullied imagined community that renders them morally impoverished and culturally regressive. These same Anglo characters, of course, never employ a scientific rationale, but their dialogues attest to the power of discourse in the construction of race and gender, as if both were, in fact, empirical givens. In Texas, discourse accommodates power, reflecting Michel Foucault’s insight that discourse itself operates as a type of violence

220 We arrived at these savage lands with the idea of subduing forests, beasts, and the inhabitants. We brought culture and salvation” (my translation).
221 In his book examining the history of U.S. political policy toward Latin America, political scientist Lars Schoultz reminds us that the very annexation of Texas stemmed in great part from the latent anxiety regarding the place of slavery in the nineteenth-century United States: “expansion into Texas,” Schoultz argues, “offered a much-needed answer to the question of race in min-nineteenth-century America, and it was this wedding of Manifest Destiny expansionism with racial anxieties—the two strong currents of U.S. public opinion at the time, neither of them sectional—that facilitated the annexation of Texas” (Beneath the United States 26).
that retains its authority through repeated practice (Archaeology of Knowledge 229).\textsuperscript{222}

Boullosa mobilizes dominant racial discourses from the mid-nineteenth century in order to explore how speech advances the coloniality of masculine power. By doing so, the author explores how these pervasive racial ideologies condition and safeguard the standards of accepted Anglo manhood and its attendant cultural privileges.

Consider, for example, how Stealman’s own assurances condone United States intervention through a moral compulsion that links territorial expansion to the workings of providential justice:

‘La justicia y la benevolencia de Dios no permitirán que Texas quede otra vez más en manos del desierto hollado sólo por salvajes, ni que quede siempre regido por la ignorancia y la superstición, la anarquía y la rapiña del regimen mexicano. Los colonizadores han llegado cargando su lenguaje, sus hábitos, su natural amor por la libertad que los ha caracterizado siempre, a ellos y a sus antepasados.’

\textit{(Texas 202)}\textsuperscript{223}

Readers realize that Stealman’s deeply rooted racial biases run concurrent with his entrepreneurial ambition. Rather than limit her scope to facile questions of land acquisition, then, Boullosa exposes the different discourses and ideological frameworks that permeate the region, forcing readers to view the maintenance of power and the construction of imagined communities through discursive regimes. Edward Said’s observation on empire proves especially relevant in this regard: “Neither imperialism nor

\textsuperscript{222} Specifically, Foucault contends, “We must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to thing, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them; it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity” (Archaeology of Knowledge 229)

\textsuperscript{223} “The justice and benevolence of God will now allow that Texas come to be once again in the hands of a desert treded on only by savages, nor that it be governed by ignorance and superstition, the anarchy and robbery of the Mexican regime. The colonizers have arrived carrying their language, their customs, their natural love for liberty that has always characterized both them and their ancestors” (my translation).
colonialism,” Said argues, “is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination” (*Culture and Imperialism* 9). Throughout the novel, the Anglo male characters construct and perform their masculinities in ways that reflect this discursive caricature of Mexicans as an antagonistic specter--feminine and retrograde--who collectively lack the cultural capital and racial pedigree to accommodate the rights of U.S. citizenship.224

The dialogue between Stealman and his Anglo male colleagues only reinforces the novel’s linking of masculine power to anti-Mexican discourse, and Boullosa highlights the ubiquity and normativity of these racial ideologies by opting not to specify the identity of the characters as they converse:

--Son una raza condenada al hurto, la holgazanería, la estulticia, la pereza, la mentira. Desconocen la noción de futuro, como las bestias.

... 

--Se parecen más al perro que al hombre.

... 

--Son lascivos, los mexicanos. Me parece su característica principal. Sólo tienen apetito por el placer inmediato. Desconocen la ambición.

--Es por la mezcla de razas, estoy de acuerdo. (203).225

224 Writing in regards to how Anglos categorized Mexicans in racial terms during the nineteenth century, Laura E. Gómez writes, “Mexicans presented peculiar problems of categorization, but, in the end, it was mixture itself that signaled inferiority, relative to Euro-Americans and, especially, Anglo-Saxons. In this way, Mexicans, like blacks, were stereotyped as essentially child-like, a characterization that implied they were unfit for self-government and for citizenship” (*Manifest Destinies* 61).

225 “They are a race condemned to theft, laziness, foolishness, lies. They are ignorant of any notion of the future, just like animals. / They look more like dogs than they do men. / They are lascivious, those
--Los mexicanos saben tratar bien a los caballos porque hay simpatía entre ellos, son iguales. Es notable la manera en que los entienden.

--Hay una explicación evidente. Los mexicanos tienen alma idéntica a la de los equinos.

--No, los negros.

--De ninguna manera ... los caballos son todos temperamento ... Los negros definitivamente no tienen *personalidad*—

... 

---Estemos de acuerdo en que tampoco vale como personaje un mexicano”

(author’s emphasis 225)²²⁶

The text’s absence of any moral objections highlights for readers the efficacy and deeply rooted nature of this exclusionary paradigm. The homogenization of all Mexicans as shiftless and dishonest, compounded by their reduction to hedonistic animals, instills for these same Anglo men a moral necessity to advance their undertakings in order to combat the vices of racial miscegenation.²²⁷

The character Blast, an avid expansionist who refers to everything as “la conquista” (253), describes Mexico as “una empresa fallida” and as “un recurso del

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226 “Mexicans know how to treat their horses well because there is a sympathy between them, they’re equals. It’s notable the way that they can understand them. / There’s an evident explanation. Mexicans have an identical soul to that of horses. / No, to negros. / Not at all ... horses are all temperament ... Negros definitely don’t have *personality* / Let’s just agree that a Mexican doesn’t count as a person either” (my translation).

227 Commenting on the gender dimensions that conditioned Americans’ attitudes toward Latin American in the nineteenth-century, Amy S. Greenburg writes, “Americans [in the nineteenth-century] understood their relationship with Latin America in gendered terms. The United States was the dominant power because it was vigorous, and the states of Latin America should be submissive because they were not. The pro-slavery ideologue George Fitzhugh, writing in De Bow’s Review, declared that Mexico should be filibustered because it was, in essence, effeminate.” (*Manifes Manhood* 100)
Vaticano para hacerse de siervos, una fábrica de esclavos holgazanes” (*Texas* 253-54), thereby configuring the country as a symbolic marker that links the shortcomings of political endeavors to the supposed defects of racial heterogeneity.\(^{229}\) The Anglo men assert these antipathies as empirically sound, when in truth they merely reflect ideological loyalties and bolster American exceptionalism. In fact, even in juridical terms, the men’s comments ignore the legal precedent regarding citizenship set by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which in Article VIII conferred “rights of U.S. citizenship to all Mexican men,” thus implying that “Mexican American men were indeed white” (Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood* 94), and thereby fostering tension regarding Mexican-Americans since, as Laura Gómez argues, “this legal whiteness contracted the *social* definition of Mexicans as non-white” (author’s emphasis, *Manifest Destinies* 83). For Boullosa and her characters, though, this is beside the point, as the legal rights of all characters operate at the local level, responding in large part to the disparate discourses that inform masculinity, race, and understandings of legitimate citizenship. The insights of Joane Nagel provide insight as to why these Anglo men act in this way. In her article concerning the intersection of masculinity and nationalism, Nagel argues that “men are not only defending tradition but are defending a particular racial, gendered, and sexual conception of self: a white, male, heterosexual notion of masculine identity loaded with all the burdens and privileges that go along with hegemonic masculinity” (“Masculinity and Nationalism” 258). It comes as little surprise, then, that these racial antagonisms and

\(^{228}\) “the conquest ... a failed business ... a resource of the Vatican to make servants, a factory of lazy slaves” (my translation).

\(^{229}\) Greenburg’s comments about nineteenth century attitudes toward Latin Americans again prove helpful: “Most nativists believed their own Protestant faith to be so much more compelling than Catholicism that simple exposure to the creed within American’s enlightened political structure would be sufficient to cause mass conversion away from the ‘Romish enemy’” (*Manifest Manhood* 99).
the concomitant call for cultural and political hegemony manifest themselves in masculinist terms.

These discourses normalize an ideological framework of Anglo-Saxon cultural, political, and masculine superiority, thereby creating an imagined community that denies the prerogatives of United States citizenship to the original inhabitants of the contested borderlands. What’s more, this identification with a capitalist Protestant culture informs the collective identities and social orders that, at least for these Anglo male actors, establish physical and economic violence as mechanisms that, to borrow the words of Nancy Chodorow, “affirm collective selfhood and identity” as well as “individual selfhood” (“The Enemy Outside” 245). In contrast, the physical violence that Nepomuceno undertakes is strategic and symbolic, employed to delegitimize the existing land claims of the Anglo men without necessarily proposing the erasure of these same Anglo men from the borderlands milieu. The latter, however, enjoy the added advantage of economic and juridical hegemony, both of which force their Mexican counterparts into increasingly precarious positions, however illegal the means might ultimately prove.

This important distinction in the management of violence by these two groups does not, of course, go unnoticed by the Mexican characters. Halfway through the novel, for example, unidentified Mexican characters describe Anglo-enacted violence as a

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230 Laura E. Gómez writes at length about the complexities that arose after the collective naturalization of borderland Mexicans: “Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexicans held American citizenship. Mexicans gained this ‘collective naturalization’ at a time in American history when only white immigrants could naturalize. As a result, the treaty’s citizenship provisions can be read as conferring white legal status on Mexicans. In California and Texas, some Mexican American men possessed state and federal citizenship and participated as fully enfranchised members of the polity. But state lawmakers in both states also made sure that not all Mexican American men did. Whiteness was defined locally, by law and custom. Frequently, local practices and institutions excluded Mexican Americans from full right. This likely fell more hardly on the majority of Mexican Americans who were predominantly indigenous and of lower economic status” (Manifest Destinies 136).
strategic tool. Taking place shortly after the lynching of an innocent Mexican woman, these Mexican characters highlight the violence of Anglos as a calculated response:

‘La violencia de los anglos es estrategia para amedrentar a los nuestros, con el claro objetivo de que perdamos todo derecho y propiedad. Le llaman leyes, viene disfrazada de actos legales, es la batalla continua por las propiedades, los privilegios y los derechos elementales. Pero cualquier acto que haga alguien de origen mexicano para recuperar lo propio, así sea cultivar manzanas, en su lenguaje perverso se llamará hurto, robo o ladronería.’ (Texas 187)

Throughout the novel, the Mexican characters encounter legal and economic obstacles that reflect the region’s dominant racial and masculine discourses, with physical violence factoring prominently into these processes. In spite of these characterizations, Boullosa does not limit her scope to questions of physical aggression, representing male-enacted violence instead as a resource that advances the region’s coloniality of power: the theft of Mexican-owned cattle (“el robo de ganado mexicano se volvió práctica diaria” 45), the desolation of natural wildlife (“cuando fue mermando el bisonte por los ciboleros” 76),

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231 “The Anglos’ violence is a strategy to intimidate our people, with the clear objective of us losing all our rights and property. They call them laws, it comes disguised as legal acts, it is the continuous battle for property, for privileges and elementary rights. But whatever action someone of Mexican origin undertakes to recuperate what is theirs, even if it’s planting apples, in their perverse language they will call it stealing, robbery, or theft” (my translation).

232 The comments of historian Juan Morra-Tores again prove helpful regarding borderline violence in the immediate post-Guadalupe Hidalgo decades: “Neither the Mexican nor the U.S. government had the capacity to protect its boundary ... it was the borderland residents—Indians, fronterizos, and Americans—rather than the national states who set the pace in shaping the economic, social, and political character of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands during the first three decades after 1848. In this stateless region, borderlanders engaged in large-scale contraband, waged violence and defended themselves from it, migrated from one side of the boundary to the other, and ran away from haciendas. If anything, the border intensified the existing contradictions within frontier society ... It also accelerated the emerging contradictions, such as those between the periphery and the Mexican state (federalism vs. centralism), manifested by the merchants’ illegal commerce, which challenged the Mexican state’s custom policies” (The Making of the Mexican Border 23-4).
and political trickery (as when “[l]os mexicanos de Texas ponen su suerte bajo los buenos
sentimientos del electo gobernador del Estado” 287), among others.233

As the region’s hegemonic male presence, Charles Stealman also invokes
economic violence as a means to preserve both his business undertakings and Anglos’
control of resources in general. A man in possession of false land titles and described by
the narrator as one who values “el horario, llegar a tiempo y ya, la eficacia y la buena
presentación” (Texas 218),234 Stealman systematically strategizes to deprive Mexicans of
their land through false documents. The narrator describes his construction of
Brownsville (stylized as Bruneville in the novel) as a testament to his own ingenuity and
as beneficial to other men, like himself:

Con una inversión minúscula había hecho el trazo de Bruneville; con dinero que
sacó del Estado, la construcción de las dos calles principales; con la venta de los
lotes, un milagro, un rincón olvidado del mundo se tornó en gran prospecto de
ciudad ... los políticos consideraban a Bruneville un enclave importante,
ofreciéndole protección militar y regalándole con ésta la derrama económica que
acarrea ser base del ejército. (171)235

These efforts establish Stealman as a hegemonic presence, but they also call readers’
attention to how Stealman asserts his masculine persona through the advantages of capital
surplus, rather than the rugged dexterity of, say, Juan Nepomuceno.

233 “stealing Mexican cattle became a daily practice” (45) ... “when the buffalo were dwindling because of
the cibolers (buffalo hunters)” (76) ... “the Texas Mexicans put their luck on the good sentiments of the
governor elect of the state” (287) (my translations).
234 “the schedule, arriving on time, efficiency, and good presentation” (my translation).
235 “With a miniscule investment he had drawn up the outline of Brownsville; with the money that he took
from the state came the construction of the two main streets; with the sell of the lots, a miracle—a forgotten
corner of the world became a great prospect of a city ... The politicians considered Brownsville an
important enclave, offering it military protection and rewarding it, because of this protection, the economic
spill over that comes from being an Army base” (my translation).
Throughout the nineteenth century, an impressive number of Anglo men moved west, eschewing what many understood as the civilizing (that is, feminizing) strictures of the urbanized East coast. Arguing that “[t]he West was a safety valve, siphoning off excess population [and] providing an outlet for both the ambitious and the unsuccessful,” (Manhood in America 60), Michael Kimmel affirms that a nascent capitalist market strongly informed the construction of nineteenth-century Anglo masculinities, to the extent that autonomy and individualism were fundamental to what came to be the pervasive “self-made man” ethos. For her part, Joane Nagel argues that modern Western masculinity coalesced with the rise of nationalism and imperialism (“Masculinity and Nationalism” 249), and Freya Schiwy echoes this sentiment but does so through a colonial lens, affirming that “[t]he gendering of colonial imaginaries has operated as a means of rendering European masculinity through Othering” (“Decolonization and the Question of Subjectivity” 129). Reflecting these imperialist and colonialist dimensions in her representation of masculinities, Boullosa includes several Anglo male characters that evoke these tendencies in spite of their disparate backgrounds and social positionings.

236 Analyzing the symbolic importance of the west as an undefiled haven and the pressures from the East Coast that helped create this image, David Pugh argues, “Fearing civilization, its class system, social conformity, and moral obligations and constraints, Americans made the West—with its limitless space and undefiled nature—a grand symbol of freedom, a refuge for an endangered species who felt they had earned their independence with the Revolution but who still felt threatened by eastern influence and authority in the nineteenth century” (Sons of Liberty 16).

237 Writing specifically in reference to the economic influences that prompted may men to go west, Michael Kimmel argues, “The economic boom [of the mid nineteenth century] meant westward expansion as well as dramatic urban growth” (Manhood in America 22). The growing importance of acquisitiveness alongside an “emerging capitalist market in the early nineteenth century,” Kimmel argues, “would have dramatic consequences for the meanings of manhood in industrializing America” (22).
In the character Ranger Neals, Boullosa examines the intersection of military service and masculine performance. A Texas Ranger described by Mexicans as one of “los diablos texanos,” Neals emphasizes his participation in the U.S. invasion of Mexico, affirming that he and his companions had conquered “a un país que por veinte años había suprimido la libertad y los derechos naturales del hombre, y que había interferido con el Destino Manifiesto de América” (Texas 179). With the character Wild, Boullosa connects the construction of Anglo masculinity in large part to the desolation of natural wildlife. The narrator describes Wild as having “sangre fría” who “mata miles de bisontes sin parpadear” and who “huele los ríos de sangre como si fueran magnolias” (145).

Boullosa most critically engages the excesses of frontier Anglo masculinity in the figure of Bob Chess, who extols his status as “texiano, de acá de este lado; puro americano” (66) and who describes himself as “gente de acción” for whom “la vida está en la hechura” (66); Chess, in his own words, enjoys “el caballo, la mujer, la pistola, domar el apache y eliminar el mexicano” (66). Only later do readers learn through the narrator’s revelations that his revulsion toward Mexicans is sublimated, transferred to a grim sexual fantasy that objectifies Mexican women as little more than sexual objects whose violent conquest (“remangarle a la fuerza las faldas, penetrarla, mejor si desgarrándola, ‘sienta que se rompe”’ 240) augments his own masculine standing. An irreligious man who emphasizes his own autonomy, Chess develops ten (a)moral codes that reflect the values

238 “the Texan devils .... [he and his companions had conquered] a country that for twenty years had suppressed liberty and the natural rights of man, and had interfered with the Manifest Destiny of America” (my translation).
239 “cold blood [who] kills thousands of buffalo without blinking [and who] smells the rivers of blood as if they were magnolias” (my translation).
240 “Texas, from this side here, pure American [and who describes himself as a] person of action [for whom] life is in the doing; [Chess, in his own words enjoys] horses, women, pistols, taming the Apaches and eliminating Mexicans” (my translation).
241 “roll up her skirts by force, penetrate her, even better if you rip her up, ‘feel her break’” (my translations).
of his own masculine brand, effectively absolving the validity of an ever-absent Decalogue and displacing the authority of the paternal Godhead.242

While the male characters are many and demonstrate in their own ways the nationalism and individualism that Kimmel, Nagel, and Pugh have identified at the heart of nineteenth century Anglo masculinity construction, their actions and discourses only reflect the larger workings of nation-building and nation-defense that Charles Steelman’s entrepreneurial initiatives advance. Rather than represent the conquest of the land and its native people in terms of purely physical violence, Texas also explores the economic violence subtending the region’s “legacy of conquest.” This in particular makes Texas distinct from the other case studies. In Caballero, the male characters (from both Mexico and the United States) use physical violence to preserve or advance their cultural strongholds. In Blood Meridian, the Anglo male characters use physical violence to advance their claims to land, and later employ it to earn a profit by scalphunting non-white borderland individuals. Blood Meridian also contains episodes of epistemic violence, as when Judge Holden eliminates cultural artifacts to ensure that only his records will attest to what was. Readers learn in the epilogue of McCarthy’s text that the perpetuation of this new Anglo male code will remain uncontested, in part due to the transmutation of violence from physical and epistemic terms, to economic ones. Boullosa picks up here, exploring what philosopher Slavoj Žižek has termed the “objective violence” of capitalist systems by charting its effect on masculine performances along

242 Translated to English, Chess’s personal Ten Commandments include the following: 1.) Sleep in the open air; 2.) Know how to cook carne asada on the campfire; 3.) Sleep with a woman once a month; 4.) Never get drunk; 5.) Increase your property; 6.) Never direct a word to blacks, including Mexicans; 7.) Never go to church or a temple; 8.) Never mount a horse or travel on wheels; 9.) Always wear a pistol; 10.) Love yourself as yourself (my translation, Texas 66-7).
racial lines. Boullosa carefully affixes the actions of Stealman to the larger workings of capital accumulation and nation-building, reflecting Jay Gitlin’s insight that “local and imperial agendas informed each other” since “the agency of empire in America often operated through locals with their own agendas” (“On the Boundaries of Empire” 85, 76). In part one, the narrator assures us, “Todo lo de Stealman salía de la nada ... o mejor dicho, de su iniciativa, de su ánimo emprendedor, para el que era un lastre la mexicanidad” (Texas 171). This early configuration of Stealman as an ambitious, entrepreneurial “self-made man” foregrounds his future endeavors within a necessarily anti-Mexican scope, and the concomitant efforts to disenfranchise Mexicans, and ultimately to eliminate them altogether in the name of racial and cultural purity, attest to these working as markers of a masculine performance.

While the initial conflict between Nepomuceno and Sheriff Shears plays out against the backdrop of Stealman’s business undertakings, readers learn only much later that the titular “gran ladronería en el lejano norte” (the great theft in the far north) refers as much to Stealman’s individual extortion of Mexican property as it does to the state of Texas as a whole. In fact, the narrator reveals that Stealman invalidates the land titles of doña Estefanía (mother of Nepomuceno) through swindling and trickery, in ways that reflect his own gender biases:

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243 Whereas the other novels studied here explore violence more explicitly, in both its physical and epistemic forms, Texas critically engages how the occluded violence of capital expansion informs the construction of Anglo masculinities, in ways that negatively impact the Mexican community. In his book Violence: Six Sideways Reflections, Žižek analyzes similar phenomena regarding violence, arguing that violence should be understood as subjective (physical confrontations) and objective (the invisible systemic violence of macro-systems). Fruitful for this study is Žižek’s claim that objective violence “took on a new shape with capitalism” since “this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their ‘evil’ intentions, but is purely ‘objective,’ systemic, anonymous” (12-13).

244 “Everything that Stealman has came from nothing ... or better said, it came from his initiative, his entrepreneurial spirit, for which Mexican-ness was a hindrance” (my translation).
Stealman esgrimía en su defensa un papel firmado por la viuda quejosa, doña Estefanía, en que aceptaba el uso que hiciera de éstas ‘con objeto de proveer engrandecimiento a la región.’ Para que cerraran el pico, Stealman pagaría a sus dos hijos mayores un peso por hectárea ... ‘Lo de siempre,’ decía para sí Stealman, ‘los pasivos mexicanos’ querían sacar ganancia de los que a él le sobraba y ellos carecían: ‘Ingenio, fuerza de trabajo, devoción. Son como las mujeres.’ (Texas 171)

Just as Stealman buttresses his claims to masculine power through capital accrual, he also opposes Mexicans to the ingenuity and industrial vitality of their allegedly superior Anglo male counterparts. What’s more, readers notice that the novel’s principal disjuncture—the contested ownership of land—itself operates within a dichotomous masculinist scope that also reflects racial loyalties: like other Anglo men, Stealman vindicates his actions through a disparagement linking femininity with “la mexicanidad” (Mexican-ness), while Nepomuceno’s cattleman skills and social justice efforts configure him as a masculine model among men of Mexican descent.

Stealman’s actions strongly correspond to the insights of David Pugh, who reminds us that “[t]he cult of the self-made man and the philosophy of laissez-faire gave [opportunists] the license they needed and, social Darwinists to the core, they confiscated huge chunks of land, built great machines and factories, fixed prices via secret alliances, and formed their empires with oil, coal, and steel” (Sons of Liberty xix). David

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245 “Stealman wielded in his defense a paper signed by the grumbling widow, doña Estefanía, in which she accepted the use that they made of these lands ‘with the objective to promote the enlarging of the region.’ So that they would shut their mouths, Stealman would pay her two eldest sons a peso for every acre ... ‘The same as always,’ Stealman told himself, ‘the passive Mexicans’ wanted to make a profit from what remained but they themselves lacked: ‘ingenuity, work ethic, devotion. They are like women’” (my translation).
Montejano echoes similar sentiments, though he writes in specific regard to the historical Stealman and his associates: “The play of the market became a primary-instrument of displacement in the annexed territories. This export-oriented elite, consisting of Anglo merchants and land lawyers with Mexican merchants as minor partners, was the basic catalytic agent in this transformative process” (Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas 41). Rather than limit her critique to the excesses of frontier masculinity, Boullosa explores the processes by which a capitalist male code perpetuates empire, trivializes conquest, and encodes racial hierarchies in the name of economic progress and cultural necessity.

In fact, the normalization of these racial hierarchies and imperial ideologies becomes increasingly apparent as the novel progresses. Much later in part two, for example, readers learn that only three days after the Nepomuceno-Shears exchange, Stealman hoped to “limpiar Bruneville” (clean Brownsville) by eliminating Mexicans from the region altogether (Texas 255). Key to Stealman’s success is his ability (much like that of his rival Nepomuceno) to maintain his own position of power in spite of the divergent interests of his subordinates. Nepomuceno accomplishes this through the rallying call of territorial reacquisition. Stealman, on the other hand, aspires to forestall these attempts altogether. In spite of the male characters’ efforts to advance competing agendas, Boullosa privileges the actions of several female characters, many of whom cross the borders of gender normativity by parodying male performance or by reclaiming public space from their male counterparts.

VI. Feminine Fortitude: Border Thinking as Epistemic Disobedience

VI.A. Introduction
As we have seen, Boullosa crafts her male characters as purveyors of social (and for many Anglo men, economic) capital. Her male characters also spearhead or participate in agendas that seek to either uphold or resist a dominant racial-gender ideology. The male characters’ masculine performances incorporate physical or economic violence, as they work to disturb or preserve the region’s status quo. The female characters prove indispensable to this process. Readers will notice that Boullosa tackles gender issues in more radical ways than the authors of the other two novels studied here. In Caballero, we recall, the female characters exert greater autonomy to the extent that they are able to act out an interstitial agency through their marriages to Anglo men and, consequentially, by catalyzing the downfall of Mexican patriarchy in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. In Blood Meridian, the female characters, when they appear at all, operate as agents of a charity that proves increasingly sparse, or as disposable sexual devices for the delight of the Anglo men. In Texas, however, Boullosa casts her female characters as agents who most effectively challenge the legitimacy of the region’s coloniality of male power through what Walter Mignolo would term “epistemic disobedience” (“Introduction” 2)—that is, by contesting the narrow understandings of femininity that are subordinated to masculine directives.

Literary critic Anna Marie Sandoval claims that “[a]lthough Boullosa’s work is women-centered, male characters figure in it as foils whose presence allows criticism of patriarchy” (Toward a Latina Feminism of the Americas 47). This is not exactly the case in Texas, however, where the male characters from both sides of the border grapple with how to either preserve or contest the region’s androcentric power structures. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind several important differences in regards to how
each of the authors studied here represent women. González and Raleigh, we recall, cast their female characters as conduits for masculinity construction, while McCarthy represents them as charitable patrons and sexual devices. In stark contrast to both, Boullosa creates female characters who reclaim public space, disavow conventions of femininity, and call into question the male characters’ claims to gender superiority. Though the male-dominated socio-economic order of Texas is never entirely overturned, the female characters studied here do manage to perforate the façade of gender normativity that bolsters the region’s power structures. This, of course, should not entirely come as a surprise to readers familiar with Boullosa’s work. The author herself has affirmed that she incorporates throughout her fiction a type of “feminismo involuntario” that allows her to creatively transgress the hierarchies separating masculinity and femininity in order to explore the asymmetries of power that foreclose opportunities for her female characters in spite of their intellectual parity with their male counterparts.246

In fact, though Boullosa portrays the insurrectionary actions of Nepomuceno somewhat positively, as necessary catalysts for Mexican-Americans’ territorial restitution and rights of citizenship, she also implicitly critiques the hyper-masculine aggressions that invariably treat women as either sexual tools or static props. As the first part of the novel draws toward its conclusion, for example, the narrator strongly suggests that Nepomuceno rapes a woman because “la cabalgata le había despertado las ganas de...

246 In her interview with Emily Hind, Boullosa maintains, “Y entonces de verdad, he practicado un feminismo involuntario a la manera de Juana Inés, que todo el tiempo juega a ponerse en voz de hombre y hablar de hombre y luego brincar al lado de mujer e ir y venir entre los dos géneros con la misma fluidez, demostrando que no entiende por qué demonios si hombres y mujeres tienen las mismas posibilidades intelectuales y el mismo derecho al entendimiento, ellas no tienen derecho a todo lo demás” (“Entrevista con Carmen Boullosa” 28).
hembra,” giving “un par de monedas” to her Native American captors and leaving her stranded after he has violated her (Texas 195). If women are largely absent or marginalized from the actual historical record, the opposite transpires in Texas, where several of Boullosa’s female characters (both Mexican and Anglo, many of whom are also historical personages) exercise claims to agency while others are treated as commodities, monsters, psychotics, or scapegoats.

Readers witness one such example in the character of Magdalena, who is described as “la bella joven poblana” and who is initially configured as a domestic prop and status symbol, or a “bala segura”, as the narrator terms her, for her would-be suitor, Gutiérrez. The gender asymmetries are particularly noticeable. Gutiérrez, for example, affirms that “la mujer está bajo el dominio exclusivo del marido” and who “la moldearía [a Magdalena] a su gusto. La esposa ideal. Con ésa iba a tener hijos, por fin podría sentar cabeza” (Texas 110). In the first part of the novel, Minister Fear, a Methodist minister described by his wife as “un hombre sin corazón [que] se recofila en ... cosas perversas, innombrables”, privately configures his wife as a sort of monstrous aberration (“me casé con una pirata, es un ser sangriento” 118) after she performs minor surgery (a masculine act) on the wounded Sheriff Shears. Josefa Segovia, another historical figure, is treated as a racial other whose lynching trivializes violence and encodes misogyny in the name of retributive justice. A victim of rape, she is falsely accused of murdering her

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247 “the parade had woken up his desires for women ...”  
248 Boullosa has acknowledged the voids of feminine voices in Mexico’s historical and literary corpus. In her essay, “La autora de la Odisea, y las olvidadas,” the author affirms, “Podar o mochar grandes mujeres de nuestra memoria, nos mutila a todos” (111).  
249 “the young beautiful village girl ... [a] sure bullet” (my translation).  
250 “women is under the exclusive control of the husband [and who] would molder her [Magdalena] to his liking. The ideal wife. With her he was going to have children, at last he would settle down” (my translation).  
251 “a heartless man who takes delight in ... perverse, unnamable things” (my translation).  
252 “I married a pirate, she’s a bloodthirsty creature!” (my translation).
assailant, for which a group of local Anglo townsmen tear her dress and then beat, hang, and set her on fire: “la gente se echa a bailar al pie de la linchada, celebra la muerte de la ‘greaser’” (186). In spite of these bleak circumstances and the patriarchal structures from which they emanate, not all of Boullosa’s characters are stymied in their attempts to contest these gendered asymmetries of power.

This study examines two such female characters--the cross-dressing Sarah Ferguson (Anglo), and the landowning mother of Nepomueno, doña Estefanía (Mexican). In her own way, each disturbs long-standing notions of gender normativity, thereby contesting the primacy of their male counterparts’ claims to power, on the one hand, and engaging in a “border-thinking” that deconstructs the region’s pervasive binary of male visibility-action and feminine domesticity-subjection. Indeed, the two female characters studied here resist their relegation to marginal roles, which, as Pugh has argued, worked in part “to neutralize them [women] as threats to male autonomy and as competitors in the manly world beyond the front porch” (Sons of Liberty xx). It is this “manly world” that Boullosa works to disturb.

VI.B. Doña Estefanía: Crossing the Borders of “santa” and “fuerza maligna”

As this study has argued, much of the novel’s action and narrative tensions stem from the conflicting views regarding the legitimacy of the Mexican-Americans’ antecedent land claims. Boullosa qualifies this conflict as a deeply gendered one, as doña Estefanía’s ownership and management of land itself demonstrates. Early in the text, the narrator emphasizes the vast extent of Estefanía’s property, describing her as “[d]ueña de tierras del Río Nueces al Río Bravo” and assuring readers that a four-day trip would be

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253 “the people go out to dance at the feet of the lynched victim, they celebrate the death of the ‘greaser’” (my translation).
necessary to transverse the limits of her estate (*Texas* 11).\(^{254}\) As the text progresses, readers learn that she is the only legitimate possessor of the Espíritu Santo ranch, but that the validity of her land claims is made questionable by the demarcations of the revised U.S.-Mexico border (41). Even if the Anglo male characters appear quick to forget that it was the border that crossed Estefanía and her ranch, Boullosa does not.

In *Caballero*, we recall, the Mexican female characters defy gender strictures only to the extent that they oppose Mexican patriarchy through their marriages to Anglo entrepreneurs. The agency that these female characters execute is interstitial and limited, bolstering a vision of femininity that stresses domesticity and a model of citizenship that emphasizes whiteness and capital accumulation. In stark contrast to *Caballero*, the female characters in *Blood Meridian* appear throughout the text with typical anonymity, and their sparse presence reinforces the perceived need for either their subordination to Anglo men or their erasure altogether. The roles of these female characters are varied—mothers, charitable patrons, sex slaves, and bar-room performers—but the subservient status of each bolsters the exploits of the Anglo men, who treat these women either as conduits for their masculinities or as disposable sexual devices.

Rather than functioning as a character bereft of agency or who is dependent upon her (Mexican and Anglo) male counterparts, doña Estefanía executes considerable power in the region in terms of her land ownership, prompting the narrator to describe her as “la dueña de la mitad del mundo” (*Texas* 179).\(^{255}\) In fact, the narrator even assures us in the first part of the novel that Estefanía, termed “la señorona” (the big-shot) by some, augments her land claims in spite of her absence from the public arena: “No hay indio o

\(^{254}\) “owner of all the lands from the Nueces River to the Rio Grande” (my translation).

\(^{255}\) “the owner of half the world” (my translation).
mexicano que no la piense como la dueña de todo” (181). The irony, of course, is that in a world where “[l]anguage is a male discourse” (Anzaldúa, Borderlands 76), Estefanía’s silence works to confound (rather than perpetuate) gender biases, at the same time that her work ethic and ranch skills counterpoise the land theft of her Anglo male entrepreneurs. Charles Stealman, for one, is forced to resort to illicit means in order to advance his social and political clout against her in a town that he himself founded in the wake of conquest, as when he uses false legal documents to take over Estefanía’s land (Texas 171). Readers learn that doña Estefanía had begun to defy gender norms at an early age, preferring to ride ponies as child in spite of others’ insistence that “las damitas no deben montar” (181). Perhaps because she transgresses feminine scripts and refuses to engage in local politics, Estefanía acquires a contentious status similar to that of her son.

The narrator assures us, “No hay gringo que no quiera arrebatarle algún trozo de lo que posee” and that “más de uno la cree una incapaz que ha dejado a la región en somnolencia productiva (así justifican la razón de su ladronería, ‘por el bien de la región’)” (Texas 180). Even among characters of color, Estefanía’s reputation is far from monolithic:

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256 “There’s not an Indian or Mexican who doesn’t think of her as the owner of everything” (my translation).
257 In his discussion of the ubiquity of racist abuses that accompanied economic expansion in Texas, José E. Limón are helpful here: “This economic development, however, went hand in hand with the social and political subordination and racial estrangement of the small remaining Mexican populations in Texas and other parts of the West, in particular, the loss of their landholdings as a result of racist economic pressures from the new arrivals (often financed by Northern and British capital) and the economic exploitation of Mexican-Americans and others as cheap labor in a rapidly modernizing political economy” (American Encounters 14-5).
258 “little ladies shouldn’t ride” (my translation).
259 “There’s not a gringo who doesn’t want to snatch away from her part of what she owns [and that] more than one believe her to be an incompetent owner who has left the region in continual disuse (this is how they justify their theft, ‘for the good of the region’)” (my translation).
Los negros le atribuyen poderes mágicos. Los mexicanos creen que es como una rey-midas. Los indios la aborrecen, por su hacha han caído pueblos enteros, la consideran una fuerza maligna. Para el padre Vera, el párroco de Matasánchez ... es una santa, un angel ... A la (puerca) iglesita católica de Bruneville no le suelta un peso, así que el cura Rigoberto la considera una bruja abusiva y algo hereje.

(180)

Admired, feared, lauded, and rebuked, Estefanía disturbs gender binaries through an assiduity that puts into sharp relief the alleged superiority of her Anglo male rivals. Readers notice a number of stark contrasts between doña Estefanía and Stealman, on the one hand, and on the other, the female characters from the other novels studied here. The female characters in Caballero are never given opportunities to hold positions of power, although several female characters do voice criticism of the male characters (both Mexican and Anglo). In Blood Meridian, the gender dichotomies are even starker, since the women here only emerge to endorse the masculinities of the Anglo male characters. In Texas, however, the female characters exercise greater claims to agency by directly challenging gender conventions. Whereas Stealman endorses his claims to power through capitalist opportunism, doña Estefanía foregrounds her actions in an agrarian communalism: “no piensa en sí misma. Piensa en los problemas del feudo Espíritu Santo en la lluvia y el ganado y la mano de sus vaqueros” (author’s emphasis 280), and earlier, we learn that Estefanía has no intention of aiding the business ventures of Anglo

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260 “The negro attribute magical powers to her. The Mexicans believe that she is like a Midas king. The Indians despise her, by her axe have fallen entire villages, they consider her a malevolent force. For Father Vera, the parish priest of Matasánchez ... she is a saint, an angel ... To the (shit) catholic church in Brownsville she doesn’t even give them a peso, so the priest, Rigoberto, considers her an abusive witch and something heretical” (my translation).

261 “she doesn’t think of herself. She thinks about the economic problems of Espíritu Santo and the rain and the cattle and the help of her cowboys” (my translation).
men because “el negocio entre el Río Nueces y el Bravo es el ganado, esta tierra es generosa para criarlo” (171-2). This pragmatic focus on both community and agrarian work casts her as both literal mother and figurative father. In fact, the narrator emphasizes that Estefanía doesn’t even consider herself “una señorona,” nor does she like the term “doña.” Rather, Estefanía prefers the non-connotative nickname “Nania” (180).

For the Anglo men, who eventually overtake much of Estefanía’s property, the land functions as an entity won through entrepreneurial ingenuity, but under the direction of doña Estefanía, it loses its gendered scope, allowing the latter to embody both maternal and paternal proclivities without fostering a binary model of proper male / female performance.

VI.C. Sarah Ferguson: Cross-Dressing and Border Crossing

Boullosa also disturbs the region’s gendered power through a parody of masculine performance, in the character of Sarah Ferguson. Similar to doña Estefanía, Sarah undertakes a number of activities early on that countervail deeply rooted understandings of gender normativity. Readers learn that Sarah enjoys racetracks, betting, card games, reading, and writing—all of which are understood as exclusively masculine activities (Texas 179). What’s more, her cross-dressing and subsequent interactions with men confound the borders of proper male and female performance—a process that promotes anxiety among the nearby Mexican and Anglo men. This, however, is not a new technique for Boullosa, and critics have taken notice throughout the writer’s career. Writing with regards to Boullosa’s Son vacas, somo puercos, Andreas Goosses’s comments prove equally relevant in this study: Boullosa interrogates “las imágenes de...

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262 “business between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande is cattle, this land is generous for raising cattle” (my translation).
feminidad y masculinidad transmitidas y ascritas por la cultura patriarcal” in order to “atravesarlas, destruirlas y oponerles otras nuevas” (“Utopía, violencia y la relación entre los géneros” 135).263 Entering a local bar as her masculine persona “Soro,” Sarah garners quick attention for her supposedly masculine aura: “¡Ése!, con ése caso a mi hija,” one Mexican man shouts, “y es gringo, ¡mejor todavía!, para como están las cosas tanto mejor que sea gringo” (191-2).264 This early taunt highlights the promised social capital affixed to whiteness and maleness, both of which are parodied by Sarah’s gender-bending performance.265

Here, Boullosa deconstructs what Norma Alarcón has termed a “Kantian, dualistic male consciousness” (“Chicana’s Feminist Literature” 182) in the newly formed borderlands by parodying, through Sarah’s masculine performance, “[t]he theory of the subject of consciousness as a unitary and synthesizing agent of knowledge,” which, Alarcón reminds us, “is always already a posture of domination” (“The Theoretical Subject(s)” 37). For Boullosa, this technique highlights the advantages immanent to white male performance, as Sarah-Soro’s privileges emerge as effects of conscious masculine performance, rather than as reflections of biological dispositions. Like doña Estefanía, Sarah advances what Yolanda Melgar Pernías would term “[l]a destabilización del sujeto [que] crea un espacio de indeterminación potencialmente positivo que podría abrir la puerta a la creación de identidades nuevas o formas alternativas de subjetividad que escaparan del discurso patriarcal” (Los Bildungsromane Femeninos de Carmen

263 “the images of femininity and masculinity transmitted and ascribed by patriarchal culture [in order to] cross them, destroy them, and oppose new ones against the old ones” (my translation).
264 “This one! I’ll marry my daughter to this one! ... and he’s a gringo, even better! With the way things are, it’s even better that he’s a gringo!” (my translation).
265 See the concluding chapter of Judith Butler’s study Gender Trouble, in which she discusses cross-dressing and its implications for ideas of gender normativity (194-204).
Shortly thereafter, Sarah takes part in a card game with other Anglo men, all of whom initially think she is a man. Only later do they learn that she is a woman, but Sarah treats her masculine performance as normative—necessary only to the extent that a perceived masculinity works to position one favorably in the public arena: “¿Yo?, todos ustedes saben bien que soy mujer. Me vestí así para poder sentarme con Smiley a jugar cartas, nunca pretendí engañarlos; ustedes no pueden ser tan tontos” (author’s emphasis, Texas 208).

By transgressing the limits of proper gender performance, Sarah parodies the heteronormative order that demands a binary logic of female domesticity and male visibility. What’s more, her actions here reflect what Schiwy and Mignolo term “border thinking” by “creat[ing] experiences that open up new ways of thinking, not as inescapably or necessarily so, but as a possibility” (“Transculturation and the Colonial Difference” 24). If masculinity isn’t exactly a house of cards, Boullosa certainly treats it as a game of the same, manipulated and sabotaged by women, like Sarah, against whom the deck seems consistently stacked.

Both doña Estefanía and Sarah Ferguson engage in a type of “pensamiento fronterizo” (border thinking) by disavowing the social binaries that might otherwise relegate them to normative scripts of proper female performance. Notably, Boullosa represents this activity as occurring in both the Anglo and Mexican communities. Each character, in her own way, exhibits what Jeanne Vaughn terms “el impulso hacia algo nuevo, un sujeto-en-proceso, todavía por realizarse, que rompe de modo radical con los

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266 the destabilization of the subject [that] creates a potentially positive space of indetermination that would be able to open the door to the creation of new identities or alternative forms of subjectivity that escaped patriarchal discourse” (my translation).
267 “Me? You all know very well that I am a woman. I dressed like this so that I would be able to sit here and play cards with Smiley, I never hoped to deceive you; you all can’t be that stupid” (my translation).
268 Literary scholar José David Saldivar writes, “pensamiento fronterizo [border thinking] is the name for a new geopolitically located thinking from the borderlands of Americanity and against the new imperialism of the USA” (author’s emphasis, “Unsettling Race, Coloniality, and Class” 193).
moldes tradicionales” (“Las que auscultan’” 607). By doing so, Boullosa re-imagines the roles of these women, refusing to reduce them to either conduits for masculine performance or reproductive vehicles for the perpetuation of these dueling nation-states. \textsuperscript{270} Texas incorporates historical characters and events as props for the author’s thematic preoccupation with gendered asymmetries of power in the United States’ newly acquired Lower Rio Grande Valley, but Boullosa takes creative license with the historical record, exploring how racial ideologies, gender scripts, and conflicting discourses shape the individual subjectivities of her male and female characters irrespective of their national origin. In spite of the patriarchal privileges that provisionally relegate the latter to subordinate positions, several are able to contest and parody this paradigm. Doña Estefanía contests the androcentric scope of land ownership by managing her own estate, a process that also disturbs the logic of female domesticity and female-male dependency prevalent on both sides of the newly formed border. Her position functions as a structural block for the male capitalists who are initially unable to fulfill their expansionist aspirations. Her skillfulness likewise parodies the Anglo men, who reach toward political cronyism to fulfill their ambitions. Sarah Ferguson parodies masculinity performance, exposing how the viability of one’s identity is due in large part to hierarchies of social accountability, and unambiguously reinforcing the notion of both gender and identity as the byproduct of performative effects. Both of these characters trouble the Anglo males’ gender performances, either by inhibiting their attempts to accumulate additional territory

\textsuperscript{269} “the impulse towards something new, a subject-in-process, still un-realized, that breaks in a radical way with traditional molds” (my translation).

\textsuperscript{270} In her article, “Nationalism and the Imagination,” Spivak writes that women are valorized symbolically for their “holding the future of the nation in their wombs”--an ideology that, in Spivak’s view, “comes from the obvious narrative of marriage” (43).
and expand their national community, or by disturbing the binary logic of natural male / female performance that informs this process altogether.

VII. Conclusion: Suturing the “Herida Abierta”

Twenty-five years before the release of Texas, feminist scholar and Lower Rio Grande Valley native Gloria Anzaldúa published her groundbreaking study Borderlands / La Frontera, in which she approached the history of the Texas borderlands against the backdrop of the region’s colonial legacy and enduring history of patriarchal sexual politics. Consider the following two passages in which Anzaldúa highlights first the abuses of Anglos’ conquest of Texas, and second, a type of consciousness that might transcend these deeply rooted dichotomies (us / them, Anglo / Mexican):

In the 1800s, Anglos migrated illegally into Texas, which was then part of Mexico, in greater and greater numbers and gradually drove the tejanos (native Texans of Mexican descent) from their lands, committing all manner of atrocities against them. Their illegal invasion forced Mexico to fight a war to keep its Texas territory. Tejanos lost their land and, overnight, became the foreigners. The border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by conquest along with the land ... The treaty was never honored and restitution, to this day, has never been made. (28-9)

Historian Mark Wasserman provides background on Anglos’ transgressino of Mexican immigration policy: “Mexico prohibited further immigration to Texas from the United States (the Law of Colonization of April 6, 1830) ... By 1830, of the 28,700 residents of Texas, only 4,000 were native-born Mexicans ... The “anglos” ... ignored the constraints on immigration. Instead, they asked the Mexican government to repeal the Law of Colonization and create a separate state of Texas, which the Mexican government rejected. When the centralist President Santa Anna eliminated all autonomy for the states in 1835, the Texans rebelled” (Everyday Life and Politics in Nineteenth Century Mexico: Men, Women, and War 75-6)
[Mestiza consciousness] is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. En unas pocas centurias [in just a few centuries], the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. (102)

The former passage ironizes the dominant ‘illegal immigrant’ discourse (as prevalent at the time of this novel’s publication as it was in the late 1980s) by casting Anglo, rather than Mexican, immigrants as foreign aggressors. The latter passage promotes what Anzaldúa terms “mestiza consciousness,” a new paradigm that would later inspire Mignolo’s own “border-thinking” model. In Texas, the two female characters studied here attempt to break down gender binaries by engaging in behaviors that disturb long-standing conventions, in ways that strongly reflect Anzaldúa’s model. The history of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, from its birth in the mid nineteenth-century to the present, has defied simple characterizations and dichotomies against the backdrop of incessant conflict—a fact that led Texas folklorist Américo Paredes to affirm, “Conflict—cultural, economic, and physical—has been a way of life along the border between Mexico and the United States, and it is in the so-called Nueces-Río Grande strip where its patterns were first established” (“The Problem of Identity in a Changing Culture” 68). Paredes goes on to write that “[p]roblems of identity also are common to border dwellers, and these problems were first confronted by people of Mexican culture” (68). The words of

272 While Anzaldúa’s study has been warmly received, her theoretical call to mestiza consciousness has faced criticism. Chicano novelist Benjamin Alire Sáenz, for example, argues, “In foraging for a usable past, she fetishizes Aztec and Indian culture. Finding solutions (and identities) by appropriating indigenous mythologies is disturbing and very problematic—but even if this were not so, Anzaldúa’s project offers very little to Chicanos and Chicanas who live in mostly urban settings. At the very least, her ‘solutions’ are inappropriate for a late-twentieth-century audience” (“In the Borderlands of Chicano Identity, There Are Only Fragments” 85).
Paredes and Anzaldúa prove as relevant in our study of *Texas*, and perhaps in current political discourse at large, as they did in the authors’ own historical periods. Boullosa picks up here, confronting the region’s endemic gender and racial antipathies and exploring how each is sustained or interrogated as part of a male code.

The other authors studied here also faced particular social and political phenomena that undoubtedly influenced their understandings of the borderlands respective to their own historical backdrops. González, for one, wrote decades after a series of deadly border raids at the turn of the twentieth century and during a period of increased racial anxiety. McCarthy, however, wrote during the Cold War and Vietnam War, and during a period of increased border militarization that attested to increasing national anxiety about the porosity of the United States’ southern border with Mexico. Boullosa published her novel nearly two decades after the passage of NAFTA and the beginnings of the Juárez femicides, eleven years after the events of September 11, and six years after the failed Secure the Fence Act under the George W. Bush Administration. It should come as little surprise that Boullosa, an author who has dedicated much of her career to questions of identity, traces the racial, economic, and gendered conflicts of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands to their ideological bedrock. In *Texas*, she thematizes much of the region’s hostilities as byproducts of masculine scripts, of men (Anglo or Mexican) who strive to assert their respective claims to citizenship, territorial governance, or cultural legitimacy in ways that reflect their roles as defenders or builders of an imagined national community. *Texas* does not conclude with a subversion of the Anglos’ cultural and economic order, however much the characters of Mexican descent (male and female alike) are able to spearhead attempts at reform. What the novel does suggest, however, is
that despite the century and a half separating the novel’s diegetic setting from its date of 
publication, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands--that “herida abierta”—is still bleeding.
Chapter Five: “I will build a great, great wall”: Hyper-Masculinity, Anti-Latino/a Rhetoric, and Border Tropes as Cultural Continuum.

“It was the Treaty of Guadalupe that added the final element to the Rio Grande society, a border. The river, which had been a focal point became a dividing line. A restless and acquisitive people, exercising the rights of conquest, disturbed the old ways.”

-Américo Paredes

I. Introduction: Men (B)ordering Imagined Communities

This study has attempted to demonstrate how, in these three borderland novels, the intersection of nationalism, race, and violence informs the construction and performance of male codes that configure Anglo men as builders and/or defenders of an expanding nation-state. In her or his own way, each of the authors studied here delineates how a moral calculus embodied in Anglo male archetypes draws on distinct forms of violence (physical, economic, and epistemic) in order to advance territorial expansion and cement claims to identity along the contentious U.S.-Mexico borderlands shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. While each of these novels takes place in the mid to late nineteenth-century, the authors approach their texts from different periods in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, responding in large part to the complex racial, cultural, and political antagonisms underpinning contemporary Anglo-Mexican relations. Conflict along the border is, of course, nothing new.

In his 1958 study of Texas folklore and border history, acclaimed border scholar and folklorist Américo Paredes lamented the political and cultural machinations that transformed the Rio Grande / Rio Bravo into the modern-day border, criticizing Anglos--

“A restless and acquisitive people, exercising the rights of conquest” (With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero (15).

273 Quote obtained from Américo Paredes’s study With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero (15).
Paredes’s comments prove just as relevant now as they surely did nearly six decades ago in suggesting that the Texas-Mexico borderlands have not yet overcome their colonial legacy. Since, and even long before, its official demarcation, the U.S.-Mexico border and its adjacent borderlands have witnessed a broad panoply of racial, cultural, and economic conflict among disparate groups of individuals, in spite of the cultural and linguistic syncretism that has also characterized the communities along the nearly 2,000-mile dividing line. However, few scholars have approached the literary representation of such conflict through the lens of masculinity studies. The present project has aimed to address this void, proposing that the antagonisms represented in these borderland novels reflect and reinforce the prerogatives of dominant Anglo masculine codes. Additionally, this project has also attempted to illuminate how the narrative elements and discursive tropes employed by each author interrogate the legitimacy of these deeply rooted gender scripts and the often violent strategies undertaken to preserve the region’s male-occupied and male-policed power structures.

In this chapter, I would like to briefly reflect on two recent phenomena that arose shortly after I began researching and writing the present project: the 2014 “Border Crisis” and its representation in a Fox News video segment aired during the same summer, and comments made by Republican presidential candidate Donald J. Trump during his 2015-16 presidential campaign. Both of these affairs demonstrate how the discursive construction of Latin American immigrants and migrants continues to reify national loyalties through a binary logic of race and gender. Both events pit an imagined Anglo body politic against a criminally invasive brown specter, counterpoising the civic duty
and law-and-order respectability of the former against the alleged malice, criminality, and sexual predation of the latter. As in the novels that we have considered, border imagery plays a critical role, delineating a moral calculus of defensive action that finds its footing in hyper-masculine excess: overdue brawn, exceptional resilience, and unfettered strength in rectifying perceived social ills. In the past three chapters, I have examined how, in three borderland novels, the effects of masculine compulsion and hegemonic masculinity codify different forms of violence as licit responses for the sedimentation of individual and collective identities. I would like to now reflect on some of the ways in which these tropes continue to shape U.S. discourse around the border region.

II. Bordering, Ordering, Reporting: The 2014 Border “Crisis” and Anglo Nativism

In the summer of 2014, thousands of Latino/a refugees (most of them children) migrated to the U.S.-Mexico border, seeking refuge from the unrest and economic precarity that had long disrupted the social and political fabric of their home countries. In the United States, the issue quickly acquired political overtones, reflecting the virulent hostility of many U.S. citizens toward the needs of the vulnerable and disenfranchised, as well as an alarming ignorance of the United States’ complicity in the destabilization of Latin America’s socio-economic structures and democratically elected political bodies since the Cold War. As scholar Cari Lee Skogberg Eastman argues, “media professionals must determine for themselves what the ‘reality’ of the border is and how they will present it to the public” (Shaping the Immigration Debate 65). What, then, is the “reality” represented here?

274 For more information on this topic, see Lars Schoultz book Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America.
Consider, briefly, one Fox news story aired during the summer of 2014. This segment employs visual and discursive tropes that abject Latino/a political refugees and transform border migration to border “chaos” in order to consolidate an imagined Anglo national community. Sociolinguist Otto Santa Ana contends that mainstream media discourses often portray Latino/as as “the burden or diseases of the body politic” and as “foreigners invading the national house” (*Brown Tide Rising* 10). The discourses and visual aids studied here reflect a production code that works to represent Latino/as as illegal, criminal, and menacing, thereby encoding for viewing audiences a “cognitive ordering of events and a moral ordering of responsibilities” (Santa Ana, *Juan in a Hundred* 217). Accordingly, this video segment configures the nation state as a sacred space, a home, the security of which must be protected against brown-bodied others whose encroachment threatens the economic livelihood, political stability, and cultural intelligibility of this same imagined national community. The repeated plays of these tropes and images create and legitimize narrative codes that allow power and ideology to signify through discourse.275 In this view, then, Latino/a political refugees are discursively constructed outside of the cultural collective, as what Judith Butler would term “unlivable lives” who lack the social capital necessary to merit grievability (*Precarious Life* xiv-xv).276 As readers will recall, the three writers studied here have also approached this cultural constant along similar lines.

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275 For more information on this topic, consult Stuart Hall’s article “Encoding/Decoding,” particularly page 141.

276 In her book *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, Butler elaborates, “Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human” (xiv-xv).
In McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*, for example, the first male archetype posits Mexicans as “a race of degenerates” (34) and “a bunch of barbarians ... [who] have no least notion in God’s earth of honor or justice or the meaning of republican government” (33). Boullosa too thematizes the discursive dehumanization of Mexicans, as when one Anglo male character affirms, “Estemos de acuerdo en que tampoco vale como personaje un mexicano” (*Texas* 225). Writing in the first half of the twentieth-century and in the wake of racialized border conflict, González likewise grapples with these same dichotomies in her co-authored novel *Caballero*. Particularly relevant in this regard are the comments of “Red” McLane, one of two Anglo male protagonists, who affirms to the Mexican patriarch that “Mexicans are a conquered race” (*Caballero* 180), as well as the novel’s equation of virility and cultural superordinancy with Anglo men—“‘the more virile race now,’” to quote the novel’s parish priest, since “‘Texas will never again be ruled by the Mexicans’” (158). In each of these novels, Anglo men acquire positions of power and allocate social and economic capital through violent tactics and anti-Mexican discursive tropes. These maneuvers normalize gender and racial stratifications between these two competing groups, while also giving primacy to the imagined national communities that the male characters on both sides strive to uphold.

Nearly eight decades separate the writing of *Caballero*, our first case study, from the publication of *Texas*, the most recent novel included in this project. In spite of these temporal gaps and the unique socio-historical phenomena that inform each text, these writers share a common thematic staple: the discursive dehumanization of, and violent tactics used against, Mexicans in the newly conquered Texas. Focusing on the 2014 border crisis, I would like to briefly explore how this structural constant, conceived as a

277 “Let’s just agree that a Mexican doesn’t count as a person either” (my translation).
masculine operation for nation-building and/or defense, functions as a cultural continuum that still shapes the imaginary of the United States toward its southern neighbor.

II.A. Video Segment: Border Chaos, Faceless Migrants, and the Specter of Violence

The first video that we will examine, entitled “Border Patrol Agent Details Immigration Crisis,” was uploaded to the Fox News website on July 10, 2014. The segment opens with a short clip of President Obama in May 2011 chiding congressional Republicans for their insistence on building a higher border fence and tripling the number of border patrol agents. The camera then cuts back to the news anchor, Sean Hannity, who assures the viewing audience that the border is “no laughing matter” just as the video then displays a bright red text reading, “Chaos at the Southern Border.” Hannity is on site at the U.S.-Mexico border in southern Texas where it is raining—a particularly fitting backdrop reinforcing the “dangerous flood” tropes that Hannity and his guest employ to describe young Latino/a refugees.

The imperative to combat an invasive other in the name of national defense is far from new, and real or perceived border encroachment has created and continues to create an optics of cultural dissonance. In fact, the novelists whose works I have explored in this study each grapple with these cultural constants in ways that prefigure these more recent border phenomena. González reverses the stereotypical reduction of Mexicans as criminally invasive by positing illegal Anglo immigration in the mid-nineteenth century as a harbinger for the region’s subsequent conflict. Readers should recall the early warning in Caballero by the character Francisco to “[a]llow no Americanos on this land. Have nothing to do with them, ever, build a wall between them and what is yours ... Fight them—fight them to the end!” (19). Chaos here emerges from the activities of Anglo
entrepreneurs—a process that is partially neutralized by the authors’ ambivalent representation of Anglo men as both imperialists and emancipators. Readers will also recall how in *Blood Meridian*, it is a type of managed chaos, in the form of male-enacted violence, that appears to lend the only semblance of order for the westward-moving male collective. Rather than deprive Mexicans of agency, these narratives explore how violence against Mexicans, their dehumanization through racialized discourse, and a cultural paradigm that advances both, all work to disenfranchise Mexicans and other non-whites as outside of a national community and cultural collective. The Anglo male characters of *Blood Meridian* conceive of Mexico in negative terms—a godless terrain, a racially miscegenated wasteland, and a profane space for the construction of their respective masculine codes (29-30). It is, in short, an abjected space that the Anglo men invoke antithetically so as to bolster their alleged racial, masculine, and political superiority. The border is certainly “no laughing matter” for Boullosa either, but for reasons very different than those of the Fox News anchor and his guest. In *Texas*, we recall, Boullosa undertakes a narrative genealogy that posits antagonisms between Anglos and Mexicans as the byproducts of a Western capitalist episteme. The borderlands are described as “tierras salvajes” that beseech “la cultura [anglosajona] y la salvación” (197), with the implicit understanding that, for the Anglo characters, “[l]o más importante es americanizar Texas, y para esto el primer punto es la raza” (198). Three important structural markers take precedence: Anglos as guardians of judicial order, Mexico as a godless wasteland in need of taming, and the perceived necessity of Anglo

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278 “will lands [that beseech Anglo-Saxon] culture and salvation [with the implicit understanding that, for the Anglo male characters,] the most important thing is to Americanize Texas, and for this the first point is race” (my translation).
culture and salvation. As we shall soon see, each informs the same border tropes that are employed throughout the aforementioned news segment.

Hannity, for example, insists that “a surge of illegal immigrants is now flooding across the Texas border.” The video segment then cuts to border patrol agent Hector Garza. Just as Mr. Garza affirms that the “government is aiding and abetting these illegals,” the camera juxtaposes video segments of Latino families crossing the border while Garza continues his commentary. In this video segment viewers are unable to see the faces (or hear the voices) of the Latina/os in question. Rather than speak of the border as a humanitarian crisis, Hannity draws parallels between these political refugees (“aliens” and “illegals” in his words) to both drug cartels and even potential terrorists “from Syria, Pakistan, Yemen, other countries, [and] Afghanistan” who are also, according to Hannity, crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Mr. Garza goes on to confirm that “we’re seeing aliens from all over the world” cross over. Both Hannity and Garza employ discursive tropes that dehumanize Latina/o refugees through a metonymic association with foreign terrorists and natural disasters (“surges,” “flooding”). Speaking with regards to OTMs (border crossers who are “other than Mexican”), Garza complains that a 2008 law aimed at curbing sex trafficking does not, lamentably, justifies the expedition of “kids from Central America.” “Our country,” in Garza’s words, “is basically giving these OTMs a free pass into our country. We want to make sure our borders are secured ... and we want to be able to do our job.” Here, Garza inscribes the call to civic duty within a cultural logic that objectifies and dehumanizes political

279 Noting the ubiquity of flood metaphors concerning Latino/as, Santa Ana argues that the semantic domain of dangerous floodwaters is, in such instances, transferred to the domain of U.S.-based Latino/as (Brown Tide Rising 75). Key here are the images of a.) the nation as house and b.) othered Latino/as who, like water, are moving, restless, and require human force in order to be controlled.
refugees (“aliens,” “illegals,” and “OTMs”) while also drawing oblique parallels between these individuals and Middle Eastern terrorists. Just as McCarthy and Boullosa have illustrated in their respective texts, racialized discourses and border tropes continue to hold significant appeal by symbolically reifying the nation-state and its imagined white body politic.

By consistent recourse to tropes such as “illegal,” “alien,” and “smuggling,” which are then counterpoised alongside the “legal” border patrol agents who only want to “do their job” for “our nation,” Mr. Garza discursively constructs political refugees as criminals who are somehow intertwined within the (unrelated) world of cartel drug smuggling. Hannity corroborates this civic call to duty by affirming that border agents “put their lives on the line” and that they “do their job” while “those people who broke the law end up staying.” The camera then cuts to faceless Latina/o refugees, and viewers are then met with a long queue of standing Latina/os. Here, too, viewers are unable to see the faces of these refugees—“illegals” and “aliens,” to use the words of both Hannity and Garza, who constitute an encroaching “surge.” The antipathy toward Mexican drug cartels is discursively transferred to the faceless political refugees along the Texas-Mexico border. It is the latter, through an imposed metonymic association with drug cartels and natural disasters, who threaten the socio-economic stability of an Anglo body politic. Through video cropping, repeated discursive tropes, and ahistorical platitudes, this video segment demonstrates how anti-Latino/a tropes in this television news segment informs a production code that capitalizes on, and advances, asymmetrical relations between two different groups of individuals.
This Fox News video segment narrativizes a contemporary humanitarian crisis through production codes and ahistorical claims that favor conservative political expediency. What’s more, the repetition of threatening discursive tropes (“surge,” “wave,” “illegal,” “chaos,” etc.) minimizes the precarity of these political refugees by constructing them as criminal and invasive agents. The tropes used here derive either from the threat of natural disasters or the past criminal transgressions of border-crossing Latino/as. Again, though, these phenomena are far from novel. The authors we have studied are also conscious of these discursive markers and the efficacy with which they have been able to construct and cement social hierarchies for the personal and/or political gains of select groups. McCarthy, we recall, aestheticizes the border landscape with a biblical caliber, calling readers’ attention to the desolation of natural resources and the lack of moral qualifiers in the mid-to-late nineteenth century borderlands. In his novel *Blood Meridian*, the Anglo male characters justify racialized violence through the alleged necessity of political intervention in Mexico and later through the appeal of monetary gain. Mexicans are initially understood as invasive and unwelcomed agents, but their social descent accelerates to the point that their scalps are treated as exchangeable commodities. Spatially, Mexico typifies an abjected wasteland bereft of political order, racial intelligibility, or Protestant virtue. Through these damning characterizations, the Anglo men are able to justify their atrocities against Mexican nationals. Writing nearly three decades after McCarthy, Boullosa deconstructs the legitimacy of the legal infrastructures in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, showing how the legal system was used as a weapon of physical and economic violence against Latino/as. For Boullosa, too, the discursive dehumanization of Mexicans takes precedence. In one scene, her Anglo male
characters converse, with one commenting that Mexicans “[s]on una raza condenada al hurto, la holgazanería, la estulticia, la pereza, la mentira. Desconocen la noción de futuro, como las bestias” (203). The conversation continues, with one proposing that Mexicans “[s]e parecen más al perro que al hombre” and that they “[s]ólo tienen apetito por el placer inmediato. Desconocen la ambición” (203).

Both McCarthy and Boullosa remind readers that discursive borders that pit Anglos (allegedly self-sufficient, racially whole, and culturally pure) against Mexicans (supposedly indolent, racially unintelligible, and culturally retrograde) foster a type of cultural framework that favors the former and the nation-state in which they reside.

Ultimately, such discourse functions as a “common sense” marker once it is accepted as such by the viewing public. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall has affirmed a similar position in his scholarship concerning mainstream media, arguing that televised media— influenced by its production structure, institutional knowledge, ideologies, and assumptions about its viewing audience—must narrativize events in order to emit a coherent story whose structures are then meaningfully “decoded” by a viewing audience (“Encoding/Decoding” 138). Knowledge about Latin America refugees here arises discursively, through a media-mediated apparatuses, and works to reinforce the ideologies of elite actors and political bodies. Here, the nation-state is configured as a sanctified space, a metaphorical home, threatened by alien outsiders who could compromise the economic livelihood, social stability, and cultural intelligibility of the present body politic. The discursive tropes and metaphorical images are nothing new.

280 “They are a race condemned to theft, laziness, foolishness, lies. They are ignorant of any notion of the future, just like animals” (my translation).
281 “They look more like dogs than they do men ... They only have an appetite for immediate pleasure. They are ignorant of ambition” (my translation).
Similar phenomena occurred in California in the early 1990s with the passage of Propositions 187, 209, and 227. Beyond the discursive construction of political refugees along these lines, though, a salient gendered trope also emerges. The porosity of the United States’ southern border with Mexico renders the collective national community a vulnerable and feminine entity, and this operation proves even more noticeable when the migratory patterns of non-white non-nationals is configured as an invasive and penetrative force. The inevitable consequence of these tropes is the need for a strong (white) hypermasculine figure who will stand guard at the border. In spite of the decades separating the writing and publication of the novels studied here, each assures readers that these discursive strongholds and anti-Latino/a stereotypes emerge from a deeply rooted cultural framework of entrepreneurialism (González and Raleigh), American exceptionalism (McCarthy), and sound jurisprudence (Boullosa). The closed-masculine / open-feminine dichotomy plays an even more instrumental role in the shaping of national politics and anti-Latino discourse since the 2014 border crisis, doing so with an impressive ideological force that embroiled fear, anxiety, gender, and questions of American identity at the heart of the 2015-16 U.S. presidential race.

III. Drugs, Crimes, Rapists: Configuring Antagonisms through Border Metaphors

On June 16, 2015, real-estate mogul and reality TV star Donald Trump descended an escalator in the Trump Tower and took the stage to announce his candidacy for the Republican nomination for President of the United States. Throughout his first campaign speech of the primary season, Mr. Trump emphasized his leadership, entrepreneurial

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ingenuity, and status as a Washington outsider, contrasting the opulence of his estate and affluence of the Trump name with the alleged incompetence and weakness of the political status quo. In many ways, Mr. Trump’s speech was fittingly hyperbolic for his larger-than-life personality. In fact, arguably the most cited segment of Mr. Trump’s speech had nothing at all to do with policy proposals, although it did offer a disturbing preview of what making “America great again” might signify under a Trump Administration: 

> When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with [them]. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

Readers of these novels will understand Mr. Trump’s comments as reflections of an antiquated disdain toward Mexicans that has always proved effective in consolidating loyalties and augmenting racialized nationalisms. In *Blood Meridian*, as we have seen, this deeply rooted contempt and incipient nationalism inaugurate the novel’s plot, and inform the treatment of male-enacted forms of violence as mechanisms for constructing and defending the nation. We should keep in mind too that Trump is a billionaire, and that his business ventures quickly emerged as a rallying point for the success of hardheaded (masculine) pragmatism. In the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, though, the privileging of monetary profit, and the masculine mentality that drives it, has yielded a number of asymmetries and abuses that reinforce anti-Latino/a dichotomies. The female

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283 The staff of *Time* published the full text of Mr. Trump’s presidential announcement, on the same day, to their website under the title “Here’s Donald Trump’s Presidential Announcement Speech.”

284 In his book *The Fence: National Security, Public Safety, and Illegal Immigration along the U.S.-Mexico Border*, sociologist Robert Lee Maril exposes how increased border security and militarization during the 1990s and early 2000s did not, in fact, curb cross-border sales of illegal drugs (96-7). For a more broad overview of the cross-border drug economy in the twentieth century, see political scientist Peter Andreas’s book *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide.*
writers studied here confront this issue openly in their novels. For González and Raleigh, Anglo-pioneered capitalism held both a damning and emancipatory role, helping to erode Mexican patriarchy at the same time that it cemented feminine domesticity in a new Anglo-Mexican border milieu. Writing nearly eight decades later, Boullosa envisions the region’s dominant racial discourses and structural blocks as forces that circumvent any emancipatory potential of capitalism. In fact, readers of Texas will recall that capitalist entrepreneurialism reinforces existing cultural biases, lending viability to anti-Mexican sentiments by virtue of Anglos’ monetary success and cultural overreach. Trump’s tactics, we see, are nothing new.

In a closed-door deposition made a year later, Mr. Trump would admit that his anti-immigrant tactics were pre-meditated ploys, and his efforts were largely successful. In fact, his nativist sympathies would acquire a higher tenor and garner widespread support with registered voters by repeatedly drawing attention to the United States’ southern border with Mexico and by recycling tried-and-true discursive tropes that homogenize Mexican immigrants as a criminally invasive and sexually predatory specter. The novelists studied here address sexuality in the borderlands in various ways. In Caballero, González and Raleigh envision (hetero)sexuality as potentially emancipatory, insofar as it bolsters, through cross-border unions, a nascent borderlands capitalism. The Mexican women here marry Anglo entrepreneurs, and in doing so they acquire greater autonomy, advance a more syncretic borderlands, and work to uproot Mexican patriarchy. González and Raleigh criticize the overreach of Mexican patriarchy with regards to its rigid code of honor and sexual policing, just as they criticize the imperialist agenda of the

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285 See the article “Trump under oath: New testimony says he planned early anti-immigrant rant” by Politico reporter Josh Gerstein.
Anglo men and the abuses that it entails for borderland people of Mexican descent. The representation is an ambivalent one--critical of hacienda-based sexual ethics, yet laudatory in its treatment of capitalist domesticity. In McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*, the representation of sexuality is very different. Rather than narrativize the alleged hypersexuality of Mexicans, McCarthy posits sexual crimes against Mexican women as practices that bolster homosocial bonding among the novel’s Anglo men. Throughout the novel, Anglo male characters discursively create Mexicans as retrograde pollutants who lack the capacity to spearhead effective government, after which point they are ultimately configured as disposable commodities or (as in the case of women) as sexual devices.

If for the purposes of national defense Trump’s characterizations configure Mexicans as hypersexual and predatory, McCarthy reminds his readers that sexual abuses (by Anglo men) at the birth of the modern-day border operated in very different terms—that is, they were at that time understood by some as licit practices for necessary ends. Still, the structural constants that McCarthy highlights appear as relevant today as they did in 1985: Mexicans continue to appear in the national imaginary as menacing pollutants and invasive predators, while transnational trade deals and labor agreements commodify Mexican bodies under the mantra of free trade and economic expediency. Ultimately, McCarthy’s critical engagement of American exceptionalism reminds us that the excesses of violent Anglo masculinity are tolerated insofar as they have been validated as licit resources for noble ends. Writing within a political climate in which border tropes have acquired increasing saliency, Boullosa likewise tackles American exceptionalism, representing it as a longstanding cultural continuum that corroborates the prerogatives of a white capitalist elite. In *Texas*, Boullosa privileges the discourses and thoughts of
seemingly peripheral historical characters--Mexican men and especially women (both white and of color), whose capacities for social mobility and political representation are constrained by the hegemony of Anglo male capitalists. For Boullosa, though, both Anglo and Mexican men perpetrate sexual misconduct, and these acts normalize a gender hierarchy that the female characters strive to deconstruct through what Walter Mignolo would term “epistemic disobedience” (“Introduction” 2). Boullosa’s text traces a genealogy of power structures in the borderlands, positing its vitality in a male capitalist episteme that the Trump campaign harnessed effectively.

Early supporters lauded what they viewed as Mr. Trump’s alleged candor: “He tells it like it is” became a common banner for the Trump loyal, who viewed his increasingly divisive political rhetoric as an overdue renunciation of a stifling political correctness. The irony, of course, is that the reality TV star’s rhetoric has been anything but honest. Examined closely, his myopic rhetoric substitutes nativism for nuance, demagoguery for detail.286 Absent from Mr. Trump’s speech was any reference to the political machinations and neoliberal trade deals that sustain asymmetrical relationships between the United States and Mexico, in ways that simultaneously favor United States economic hegemony and promote U.S.-bound undocumented immigration.287 In this regard, I concur with Cari Lee Skogberg Eastman, who in her book Shaping the

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286 As early as 1985, Rensselaer W. Lee III argued in his article “The Latin American Drug Connection” that “Latin countries supply one-third of the heroin, perhaps 80 per cent of the marijuana, and all of the cocaine currently used in the United States, representing three-fourths of a U.S. drug market some estimate at up to $100 billion annually” (142). What’s more, the author argued that sanctions would likely prove futile given the entrenchment of drug cultivation in local economies. Lee also argued that in addition to the “extension of political authority,” more resourced would need to be directed to the “creation of income alternatives for farmers of illicit crops and for others employed in the drug trade” (159).

287 Joseph Nevins writes, “[W]e regard the ‘illegal alien’ as someone whose supposed criminal activity (in violating immigration laws) is independent of our own actions and thus is someone for whom we need not accept any responsibility. This is because the ‘illegal’ is someone who is out of place” (Operation Gatekeeper 161).
Immigration Debate: Contending Civil Societies on the U.S.-Mexico Border observes that in political discourse “[b]orders become a distraction, focusing attention on the result of policy--unauthorized crossings--rather than the nature of the policy itself” (author’s emphasis 79). These omissions, of course, are beside the point. Examined collectively, the novels studied here suggest that the cultural continuum of American exceptionalism continues to hold significant appeal, and that border tropes continue to function as convenient props that rally nationalist sympathies by eliding the complexities of transnational realities.

For Latin Americanists like myself, the racist and nativist strategies of Donald Trump were nothing new in the court of national identity politics. The tried-and-true stereotypes of Mexicans as figures in need of corrective American action have existed since at least the nineteenth century, and immigration has always operated as a contentious topic on the national stage, generating increased vitriol during periods of economic upheaval or widespread anxiety. The story is an old one, resurrected at different times for political expediency and almost always with alarming efficacy. As sociologist and migration scholar Stephen Castles argues, “It is much easier to turn these groups into the scapegoats for the social crisis, by blaming them not only for their own marginality, but also for the decline in general standards” (“Citizenship and the Other in...” 288

To my knowledge, Mr. Trump has not elucidated the ill effects of NAFTA on Mexico, nor has he discussed the role of the trade deal in the propagation of illicit drug and retail sales. International political economist Julie A. Murphy Erfani takes note of the latter, writing that “[i]nstead of shrinking illicit commerce,” Mexico’s integration into NAFTA “has accelerated the rise of smuggling, trafficking, intellectual piracy, counterfeiting, money laundering, official corruption, and organized crime. Unauthorized migrant labor in North America ... is only one component of the booming underground economies” (“Crime and Violence in the Arizona-Sonora Borderlands” 63). As historian Thomas Bender remarks in his discussion of American empire, “[a]n essential part of American identity is based on difference, on a tendency to define America as distinct from, even separate from, all that is foreign, whether Europe or those parts of the world Americans un-selfconsciously called ‘uncivilized’ or ‘savage’ (“The American Way of Empire” 45).
the Age of Migration” 305), or as Mrs. Stealman affirms in *Texas*, “Todas las formas de la decencia quedan atropelladas por las malas costumbres de los mexicanos” (96). 305

What disappointed many, myself included, wasn’t necessarily Mr. Trump’s discursive strategies or his anti-immigrant platform, but rather the widespread support he garnered along the way (Mr. Trump earned 14 million votes during the Republican primaries--more than any Republican candidate in U.S. history). What has not been sufficiently analyzed are the masculinist dimensions of this appeal. Consider briefly the following comments from the same speech:

I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I’ll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words. Nobody would be tougher on ISIS than Donald Trump. Nobody. I will find, within our military, I will find the General Patton or I will find General MacArthur, I will find the right guy. I will find the guy that’s going to take that military and make it really work. Nobody, nobody will be pushing us around. I will stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons. And we won’t be using a man like Secretary Kerry that has absolutely no concept of negotiation, who’s making a horrible and laughable deal, who’s just being tapped along as they make weapons right now, and then goes into a bicycle race at 72 years old, and falls and breaks his leg. I won’t be doing that. And I promise I will never be in a bicycle race. That I can tell you.

Readers of our borderland novels will recall that masculine excess is never far removed from the co-constituting domains of white nationalism and Mexican scapegoating. A

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290 “All forms of decency get run over by Mexicans’ bad customs” (my translation).
number of erroneous claims underpin Mr. Trump’s diatribe, but the clever symbolic ordering of antagonists (immigrants-terrorists-liberals) nonetheless proves effective, doing so through a masculinist ethos of brazen resiliency, no-nonsense unilateralism, and rugged self-made individualism. Geoffrey Robinson contends that Trump supporters “dwell in a late-capitalist culture of isolation and solitude, haunted by the dream of self-creation that Trump demonstrates. In him they see not just business skills but the power they lack” (“Donald Trump’s Conservativism” 37). Perhaps, but the allure has as much to do with gender as it does with grandeur. In the above passage, for example, Mr. Trump provides a sequential narrative of threats and weaknesses, imparting a cognitive blueprint for his audience that culminates in the moral imperative to respond to international threats (ISIS) and national weakness (porous borders, a fragile military, and a feeble Secretary of State) with overdue brawn. That former New York Senator and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was expected to emerge as Mr. Trump’s Democratic opponent only worked to entrench a binary that inevitably exacerbated gender issues.

The Trump phenomenon has understandably garnered widespread attention since the real estate mogul’s June 16, 2015, presidential announcement, and subsequent electoral victory. I would like to explore how the candidate’s nativism, racialized discourse, and frequent recourse to border tropes operated as a cultural continuum that reflects the same paradigms that the novels studied here confront and challenge. I argue that the continuation of these phenomena configure Mr. Trump today as a hyper-masculine protector presence, whose dogged fortitude and perceived strength mitigate (or

291 Consider, for example, Mr. Trump’s claim that the proposed border wall would be an inexpensive investment. In his Washington Post opinion piece entitled “Build the Wall,” Robert J. Samuelson cites a report by the global assessment management firm AllianceBernstein, which estimated the total cost of Mr. Trump’s wall to be between $15 billion and $25 billion.
inflame) the anxieties of his largely Anglo voting demographic. The shared hostility toward non-whites advances a false consciousness that displaces the culpability of national anxiety onto a voiceless brown monolith—Latinos, Muslims, immigrants, or indeed any individual whose racial pedigree, religious affiliation, or language capacities disturb a largely white, English-speaking imagined community. This cultural, linguistic, and racially heterogeneous specter contrasts the self-termed “silent majority” voting base that helped Mr. Trump secure his party’s nomination, and ultimately the presidency.

IV. Make America Masculine (Again): A Capitalist Cowboy and the Exploitation of White Male Anxiety

Mr. Trump’s initial remarks about Mexicans sparked widespread outrage. Mexican-American actress America Ferrera thanked Mr. Trump “for reminding us that there remains an antiquated and endangered species of bigots in this country that we must continue to combat,” promising that his remarks would push greater numbers of left-leaning Latino/as to the polls in November. NBC Universal, Macy’s, Univision, and Serta began rescinding their business ties with the real-estate mogul. In spite of this initial controversy, the stereotypical reduction of Mexican immigrants to criminals and sex offenders proved to be only the first remark in what would evolve into a long list of broad-brushed insults capped by an expressed disdain for international peacekeeping alliances. In fact, Mr. Trump has extended tropes beyond the U.S.-Mexico divide to encompass NATO, China, and Iran, to list only a few examples. With allegations of misogyny, xenophobia, racism, demagoguery, and anti-Semitism plaguing his campaign, Mr. Trump acquired a contentious status unlike most other presidential candidates in modern memory.

292 Ms. Ferrera’s response to Mr. Trump was published online by The Huffington Post under the title “Thank you, Donald Trump!”
The masculinist dimensions of the candidate’s appeal have not entirely been overlooked, nor, at times, have they even been avoidable, as when the reality TV star boasted about the size of his penis during a nationally televised Republican debate. In an article published to the online news source Alternet, cognitive linguist George Lakoff postulates that much of Trump’s support is likely derived from the symbolic aura that he projects through the ploys of “strict father morality,” whereby “a well-ordered world” emerges from “a moral hierarchy in which those who have traditionally dominated should dominate ... God above man, man above nature, the disciplined (strong) above the undisciplined (weak), [and] the rich above the poor” (“Understanding Trump”). Critical for Lakoff are the two divergences in neural circuitry that characterize conservative and progressive thinking: direct causation (which demands direct action to remedy immediate problems) and systemic causation (which configures conflict as the result of causal chains). Consider Lakoff’s comments at length:

Empirical research has shown that conservatives tend to reason with direct causation and that progressives have a much easier time reasoning with systemic causation. The reason is thought to be that, in the strict father model, the father expects the child or spouse to respond directly to an order and that refusal should be punished as swiftly and directly as possible. Many of Trump’s policy proposals are framed in terms of direct causation. Immigrants are flooding in from Mexico: build a wall to stop them. For all the immigrants who have entered illegally, just deport them--even if 11 million of them are working throughout the economy and

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293 Mr. Trump specifically responded to the accusations by Republican presidential hopeful Marco Rubio (R-FL), who criticized the allegedly small size of Mr. Trump’s hands at a campaign appearance.

294 Lakoff argues that direct causation “appears to be represented in the grammars of all languages around the world” while systemic causation “is more complex and is not represented in the grammar of any language. It just has to be learned” (“Understanding Trump”).

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living throughout the country. There are at least tens of millions of conservatives in America who share strict father morality and its moral hierarchy. Many of them are poor or middle class and many are white men who see themselves as superior to immigrants, nonwhites, women, non-Christians, gays, and people who rely on public assistance.

In his aptly titled article “Trump Reflects White Male Fragility,” New York Times columnist Charles M. Blow sheds further light on the masculinist scope of Mr. Trump’s campaign. Blow contends that Mr. Trump “appeals to a regressive, patriarchal American whiteness in which white men prospered,” and that for the candidate’s white male supporters, American history is conflated and embellished with ambiguous exceptionalism, lauding “[w]hite men [who] reigned supreme in the idealized history [when] all was good with the world.” This revelation should not surprise us. In fact, the novelists studied here affirmed as much long before the rise of Donald Trump. McCarthy, we recall, interrogates American exceptionalism by positing racialized violence against Mexicans as a nation-building force that reaches deep into the cultural imaginary, and masculine codes, of the United States. González and Raleigh are more sympathetic to this cultural framework, arguably out of necessity. Even so, their critique is a pointed one, reminding readers that the benefits of Anglo occupation of Texas run concomitant to the abuses of territorial conquest. In Texas, Boullosa further deconstructs this “idealized history [when] all was good with the world” by narrativizing the abuses that his cultural framework normalizes and perpetuates along gender and racial lines. When, according to Trump, was America “great”? He himself has pointed to the beginning and middle of the twentieth century, lauding what he views as the United States’ respective
entrepreneurialism and military strength at those times, and praising figures such as Theodore Roosevelt and generals Douglas MacArthur and George S. Patton.\textsuperscript{295} Still, his nativist rhetoric and impractical border proposals nonetheless allude to an amorphous ideal of greatness, and that is part of the allure: a horizontal camaraderie with the nation’s white male forbearers, a vertical moral ordering that privileges self-made man autonomy, and a cultural script that normalizes what Croatian philosopher Rada Iveković, in her article “The Reason(s) of Nature and Gender,” has termed “the differential subjectivation and citizenship of women and men” (author’s emphasis 22).\textsuperscript{296}

In their concluding book chapter “Borders in a Changing Global Context,” Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen observe that “[w]hile borders continue to serve to order our daily lives, they also perpetuate difference and ‘othering’ along with belonging and identity” (193). In each of the novels studied here, borders--geographical, linguistic, racial, sexual, or gendered--complement a cultural order of entrepreneurial ingenuity and Anglo male superordinacy. This framework, in turn, reifies the nation-state as an imagined community of Anglo nationals, while configuring male actors as architects and defenders of the nation-state and its cultural heritage. The binaries are simple, but the cognitive blueprint that they encode legitimizes the same cultural exceptionalism that the texts studied here deconstruct in unique ways. Is Trump’s physical wall between the U.S.

\textsuperscript{295} Different portions of the full 100-minute interview were reported by both \textit{CNN} and the online edition of \textit{The New York Times}. To read Trump’s comments about both of these historical periods, consult the \textit{CNN} article by Gregory Krieg entitled “Donald Trump reveals when he thinks America was great.” To read about Trump’s high regard for Theodore Roosevelt, as well as how he planned to differ from Douglas MacArthur regarding the use of nuclear weapons, see David E. Sanger and Maggie Haberman’s piece in \textit{The New York Times} entitled “In Donald Trump’s Worldview, America Comes First, and Everybody Else Pays.”

\textsuperscript{296} Iveković explores the marginalization of gender as a viable philosophical category in relation to nationalism. She writes that “women have been kept in pre modernity well beyond the threshold of modernity. The non-historicity of the ‘eternal feminine’ was thus asserted. It was therefore out of the question to imagine reforming society in view of gender-justice, and the status of philosopheme is denied to gender: the question was closed, and reason too” (author’s emphasis 25).
and Mexico economically attainable? Perhaps, but only after Congress’s approval of serious budget adjustments, such as the proposed $18 billion cut to infrastructure, medical research, and community grants. In terms of geographical feasibility, the answer is far more nebulous. Additionally, his initiatives would come at a great price, such as the estimate listing a nearly $40 billion price tag for the proposed border wall with Mexico. What’s more, his recommended deportation of 11 million undocumented immigrants would require both an estimated twenty years to undertake and an estimated $400-600 billion in funding. Part of the success behind Trump’s geopolitical and metaphorical borders is that they function as a springboard for national identity and exclusion, creating (b)orders of cultural intelligibility by marginalizing brown bodies from the cultural script altogether, and by promoting the erasure of their linguistic, cultural, and religious heterogeneity. Here, white male anxiety operates as the catalyst propelling much of Mr. Trump’s success, reaching for the horizon of an idealized past where the social and economic capital of the nation’s male architects remained unburdened by the peripheral specter of women and non-whites.

This, of course, is not to say that the fragility of Anglo masculinity operates as the sole nexus for Mr. Trump’s popularity. The reasons behind Mr. Trump’s success are

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298 The geographical challenges are many. For one, the border wall would have to withstand the Rio Grande River. The Trump Administration would also face legal challenges given the fact that nearly one-third of the nearly 2,000 mile border is either federal or tribal land. What’s more, the wall would disturb the natural habitats of threatened wildlife. See the article by the Associated Press entitled “Zinke: Border Wall ‘Complex,’ Faces Geographic Challenges,” published by The New York Times.

299 See the New York Times article by Daniel Ivory and Julie Creswell entitled “One Certainty of Trump’s Wall: Big Money.”

300 For information about pricing for the proposed border wall, see Russel Berman’s piece in The Atlantic entitled “The Conservative Case Against Enforcing Immigration Law.”
likely diverse and complex, and they should not be reduced merely to questions of xenophobic anxiety or gender scripts, however much both inform understandings of domestic and international phenomena. It is worthwhile to note, nonetheless, that less than a month after Mr. Trump’s campaign announcement, he had already secured a lead in national polls against the other sixteen Republican candidates, and in spite of the panoply of insults that he issued throughout his campaign, Mr. Trump maintained and extended his lead for the greater part of the primary contest. I mentioned earlier that that the homogenization of Mexicans as criminals and sexual predators occluded the complexities of phenomena that prompt national anxiety, such as middle class wage stagnation, border porosity, or the perceived increase in crime and domestic terrorism. In fact, Mr. Trump’s abjection of Mexican immigrants as criminal and sexually predatory others, in addition to his consistent recourse to nativist rhetoric and border imagery, strongly corresponds to what Noam Chomsky has termed the “manufacture of consent”--a “process of creating and entrenching highly selective, reshaped or completely fabricated memories of the past” in order to block “any understanding of what is happening in the world” (“The Manufacture of Consent” 124). This propagandistic process, Chomsky argues, “divert[s] attention from the sources of our own conduct, so that elite groups can act without popular constraints to achieve their goals--which are called ‘the national interest’ in academic theology” (124).³⁰¹ Border tropes and border imagery, I have argued, are particularly effective in consolidating nationalist loyalties by assuming cultural orders as homogenous and atemporal--ever present across space and time, and

³⁰¹ Chomsky does not see this process as a recent phenomenon. Interestingly, he cites the rationale of the Mexican-American War as but one example: “In earlier years, we were defending ourselves against other aggressors. When Polk stole a third of Mexico, we were defending ourselves against Mexican ‘aggression’ (initiated well inside Mexican territory)” (“The Manufacture of Consent” 128).
beginning and ending at nation-state boundaries. The cultural, racial, and linguistic reality, however, is far more heterogeneous than these binaries pretend. The novels studied here interrogate these real and imagined borders, exploring how male characters function as agents who construct and defend this imagined national community.

V. The Border as Political Theater: Economic Asymmetries, Increased Militarization, and Direction for Future Research

The U.S.-Mexico border has received numerous monikers since it was “carved in the midst of U.S. imperialism,” to again use José David Saldivar’s phrase (Border Matters 8). Gloria Anzaldúa famously termed it “una herida abierta” (an open wound) (Borderlands 25), and in his novel Gringo viejo (1985), Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes wrote, “Con razón ésta no es frontera, sino que es cicatriz” (175). More recently, the border has been identified as “the largest known structure of inequality in the contemporary world” (Grimson, “Cultures are More Hybrid Than Identifications” 100). Such was not always the case. Historian Rachel St. John reminds us that “[i]n the nineteenth century there were no border fences” and that “[t]he U.S. government did not prevent Mexican immigrants from crossing the border or even record their entries” during this time (Line in the Sand 1). As the United States and Mexico have made impressive forays into an increasingly globalized market, the role of the border has taken on added nuance in economic, social, and political terms. The discursive construction of Mexicans as criminally invasive and hypersexual occludes the macro-processes by which these same individuals experience what Judith Butler would call “dispossession”—the increasing dehumanization and disposability of brown bodies through the “exploitative excess” of “neoliberal forms of capital” (Dispossession: The Performative in the Political

302 “With good reason, this isn’t a border, but rather a scar” (my translation).
The writers of these novels urge us to see beyond these binaries and the facile image of cultural and racial homogeneity that they represent. In these narratives, as in life, borders—real or perceived—do not hold, or as the narrator in Boullosa’s *Texas* reminds us, “El Río Bravo divide al mundo en dos categorías, puede que hasta en tres o en más. No hay afán de decir que en una sola están todos los gringos, en otro los mexicanos ... Las categorías no son cerradas” (33). While nationalism holds significant appeal in the shaping of cultural imaginaries and political initiatives, the relationship between Mexico and the United States has oftentimes reflected a transnational reality of interdependent economies, cultural exchange, and labor networks. Accordingly, future research must gauge the narrative representation of these transnational elements, and how writers along and on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border respond to the cultural conflict, economic disparities, and militarization that continue to characterize the region.

I would like to end by briefly reflecting on what I have called the “cultural continuum” of border tropes and American exceptionalism. In 1900, Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó published *Ariel*, an essay in which he lamented the social and cultural effects of materialism in Latin America. Rodó was very much aware of the United States’ presence on the world stage, highlighting Americans’ “sovereign concept of individualism ... their grandeur and empire ... the absolute integrity of personal autonomy” and how “each man [there is] the author of his own destiny” (30). Rodó admired the efficiency of U.S. culture, but he was also skeptical, noting that Americans “advance toward the future under the power of a stubborn and arrogant expectation” and that this cultural efficiency could only take effect “as long as it is directed to the practical

303 “The Rio Grande divides the world into two categories, maybe even three or more. There’s no eagerness in saying that in one there are all gringos, in another the Mexicans ... Categories are not closed off” (my translation).
goal of realizing an immediate end” (30). One hundred fifteen years separate the remarks of Rodó from those of Mr. Trump cited above, with the former now appearing more like a prophetic prelude for the latter. Mr. Trump’s wall proposal is far from feasible, bordering on the absurd more than it could ever border two nation-states. Still, the message, emerging from nativist rhetoric and a binary logic of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ has continued to find solid footing in the imaginations of millions of voters, responding to anxieties that reflect a number of complex phenomena. If Mr. Trump’s immigration stances are not feasible proposals, they do manage to achieve Rodó’s “practical goal of realizing an immediate end” (30). In many ways, Mr. Trump’s comments correspond to the insights of Kathleen Staudt regarding border rhetoric and hyper-masculinity:

At the U.S.-Mexico border ... two hypermasculinity variants collide and collude: one related to national security and the consequent militarization of everyday life ... and the other related to a backlash against real and perceived threats (men’s backlash against women, and xenophobes’ backlash against immigrants). Rather than producing security, the results of these forces aggravate human insecurity in terms of everyday violence, sporadic violence, and policy-induced deaths at and near borders, as well as lingering poverty from policy-generated, market-based inequalities that fester from free-trade regimes. (“Violence at the Border” 4)

Rather than prioritize one or the other, Mr. Trump has built much of his campaign and consolidated much of his support by embodying both of these proposed “hypermasculinity variants.” Borders and their exclusionary logic are old staples in American mythos, recycled at different times and given legitimacy through appeals to social, cultural, or religious imperatives. The writers of our three novels have
demonstrated as much, nuancing their representation of these cultural constants in unique ways that respond in part to their own historical junctures.

VI. Conclusion and Direction for Future Research

The increasingly globalized nature of the world, particularly since the “neoliberal turn” of the 1970s, has done little to abate both the ubiquity and efficacy of border tropes, in part because, as literary scholar Claire F. Fox has correctly noted, “border regions are growing as the power of nation-states relative to transnational capital is decreasing” (The Fence and the River 4). My own inclination is to believe that in the coming years, the surprising rise of Donald Trump will be attributed to the unsurprising latency of white nativism, masculine brawn, and the neoliberal economic policies that inform both. I have devoted my research here to how Anglo men in the narratives studied here (all of which take place during the nineteenth century) are able to allocate greater social and economic capital through the violent performances of specific male codes. For border narratives with more recent diegetic settings (particularly after the 1970s), future research will need to examine the continuum of this border imagery, its permutations (if any), and in particular how authors configure the region’s legacy of conquest against the backdrop of transnational economies, increasing economic disparity between the United States and Mexico, and renewed Anglo nativism on the northern side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Scholars should also take note of the gendered dimensions that subtend these representations—how, for example, cross-border mobility and socio-economic opportunity emerge along gender lines and reinforce or trouble dominant cultural scripts. Though the United States and Mexico have grown increasingly interconnected in terms of economic exchange and immigration networks, cross-cultural dialogue has not always
triumphed, and border imagery and masculinized nationalism, as I have attempted to show here, continue to hold significant appeal. Accordingly, literary scholars approaching border literature should nuance their work historically, acknowledging both the socio-cultural frameworks of border writers, and how the diegetic settings of their narratives serve as an artistic intervention to contest or interrogate intersectional patterns of conflict.
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Professional Appointments and Employment

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