Latin American Research Review (2023), **58**, 972–984
doi:10.1017/lar.2022.78

LARR Latin American Research Review

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

The US-Mexico War, *la Frontera*, and Their Afterlives

María Carla Sánchez

University of North Carolina Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina, USA
Email: mcsanche@uncg.edu

This essay reviews the following works:

North American Borders in Comparative Perspective. Edited by Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera and Victor Konrad. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020. Pp. xiv, 408. $40.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780816539529.

Fencing In Democracy: Border Walls, Necrocitizenship, and the Security State. By Miguel Díaz-Barriga and Margaret E. Dorsey. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020. Pp. ix, 178. $24.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781478006930.

Border Optics: Surveillance Cultures on the US-Mexico Frontier. By Camilla Fojas. New York: New York University Press, 2021. Pp. 208. $28.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781479807017.

The Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War. By Peter Guardino. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017. Pp. 502. $39.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780674972346.

Illusions of Empire: The Civil War and Reconstruction in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. By William S. Kiser. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. Pp. 262. $55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780812253511.

The Latino Continuum and the Nineteenth-Century Americas: Literature, Translation, and Historiography. By Carmen E. Lamas. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. ix, 277. $80.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780198871484.

Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands. By Kelly Lytle Hernández. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2022. Pp. 384. $30.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781324004370.

Border Citizens: The Making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona. By Eric V. Meeks. Revised edition. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020. Pp. xi, 368. $32.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781477319659.

Refugiados climáticos: Un gran reto del siglo XXI. By Miguel Pajares. Barcelona: Rayo Verde Editorial, 2020. Pp. 280. $33.00 paperback. ISBN: 9788417925345.

In the 1980s, when the late scholar Gloria Anzaldúa wrote in *Borderlands/La frontera* that "the U.S.-Mexican border is *una herida abierta*," her words heralded a sea change in scholarly approaches to this geographic area, its peoples, and the intertwined (inter)national histories that brought it into being. Often heralded as a pioneering work of Chicana feminism and an articulation of Mexican-American identity, another contribution of

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Latin American Studies Association. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original article is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained prior to any commercial use.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Borderlands tends to be overlooked: its insistence on understanding the very existence of *la frontera* as the result of regrettable social and cultural conflicts. Far from being a natural or necessary element of parallel nation building, Anzaldúa's borderlands exist as a living proof of Manifest Destiny's brutality: a place in which "the Third World [was] grating against the First World, and bleed[ing]. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture."[1] That border culture, far more so than when Anzaldúa first penned those words, is now a locus of the long-lasting aftershocks of war. It is marked by the two countries' bloated military budgets; by official as well as extralegal surveillance of migrants and, often, Latino citizens of the United States; and it is scarred by the desperate travails of millions of would-be refugees from Central America's Northern Triangle as well as from further abroad. Despite all this, a vibrant culture forged in Spanish, English, and Spanglish persists and in many cases thrives. Nearly forty years after Anzaldúa, but fewer than five years on from the Trump administration and its "zero tolerance" approach to asylum seekers, how do scholars studying the border—its creation, its role in subsequent conflicts, and its influence in two contemporary societies—approach what for many continues to be *una herida abierta?*

Several recent publications revisit the US-Mexico War, its effects on later nineteenth-century history, and its creation of these borderlands with which we now live: Peter Guardino's *The Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War*; William Kiser's *Illusions of Empire: The Civil War and Reconstruction in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*; and Kelly Lytle Hernández's *Bad Mexicans*: *Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands*. Together with several new works investigating aspects of life in and along *la frontera* now, these recent studies stand as testaments to the persistence of the Anzaldúan turn. All begin from the *Borderlands* vantage point: a refusal to entertain border history as admirable exceptionalism or necessary sacrifice. Instead, they insist on a clear-eyed stocktaking of what brought Mexico and the United States to their current state of affairs.

Those that analyze nineteenth-century history, particularly the US-Mexico War and its influence on the Civil War that followed soon after, have ample ground to traverse. Yet the war itself is strangely located in United States history; it is understood by historians as profoundly consequential to national development and yet is understudied at every educational level. The prevailing belief among historians that the ongoing resonance of the Civil War prevents a true comprehension of the earlier war's relevance has become a mantra of sorts in the profession. Indeed, in the introduction to his work *Remembering the Forgotten War*, Michael Scott Van Wagenen quotes fellow historian John S. D. Eisenhower's lament that "the Mexican War has been practically forgotten in the United States."[2] That viewpoint comes from Eisenhower's own study *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846–1848*. There is no paucity of accounts of the conflict: along with Van Wagenen's, the US market alone has seen efforts from Ernesto Chávez, David Clary, Amy S. Greenberg, and Joseph Wheelan published in the last two decades. These join late twentieth-century entries like Eisenhower's, and Robert W. Johannsen's *To the Halls of the Montezumas*. These titles speak solely to general histories, as opposed to more focused works such as Paul Foos's excellent *A Short, Offhand Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the Mexican American War*. Add to all of these the veritable treasure trove, academically speaking, of narratives from the war's participants as well as from academics

[1] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (New York: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 25.

[2] Michael Scott Van Wagenen, *Remembering the Forgotten War: The Enduring Legacies of the U.S.-Mexican War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

writing in the early decades of the 1900s, and one can hardly argue that Americans remain ignorant of the war and its consequences because of lack of reading material.[3]

Neglect of the subject on the Mexican side, however, is a badly kept secret. The war is not merely a difficult subject for those living in *la frontera*, but it remains so for generations of Mexicans, from Baja to Quintana Roo, who have watched their countrymen and women leave behind families to work in the United States, often in places that once formed part of Nueva España. Works by Mexican historians, such as Jesús Velásquez Márquez's *La guerra del 47 y la opinión pública, 1845–1848* or Josefina Zoraida Vázquez's *México al tiempo de su guerra con Estados Unidos, 1846–1848*, appear infrequently.[4] Thus it would seem that US historians find the war endlessly fascinating, while Mexican historians place their energies elsewhere, for example, on the Revolution or the War for Independence. Somehow a conflict that killed tens of thousands and redrew territory and political power on the North American continent remains opaque to the millions—some neither Mexican nor US citizens but Central and South Americans—who live in the war's very real and ongoing wake.

Into this mix come a number of recently published scholarly works, all intent on revealing heretofore undiscovered truths regarding the war and its consequences. Peter Guardino's *The Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War* pays homage to the Anzaldúan sea change in its very title. "The dead march," or "the music that accompanied funerals," is referenced in the memoirs of the US soldier Isaac Smith, a volunteer from Indiana, and its lyrical suggestiveness inspires Guardino (1). The book's introduction opens with a quotation from Smith's memoirs, suggesting that the soldier's "words resonate far beyond that specific reference" (1). Indeed, they lead to Guardino's scene- and tone-setting statement that "the war that took place between the United States and Mexico was, more than anything else, tragic" (1). With this declaration and the imagery of the title, Guardino stakes out the elegiac ground of his study. This history of the Mexican-American War emphasizes its all-too-solemn costs: as experienced during its short duration, seen in each country's later wars, and repeatedly manifested during the century and a half that has elapsed since. It follows the motif established by Anzaldúa and repeated by studies such as Greenberg's *Wicked War* in viewing the conflict as a shameful war of choice (on the US side), in line with similar, now-lamented US military involvements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The Dead March bills itself as "a social and cultural history of the 1846–1848 war that focuses on the experiences and attitudes of ordinary Mexicans and Americans, both soldiers and civilians" (4). It is thus an example of the "new military history" that redirects the gaze of the reader away from famous names and well-documented battles (5). For the author, both "Mexicans and Americans of relatively modest social status, . . . who did the hardest work and faced the greatest risks," represent an undervalued source of information regarding the war and its effects (22). (The memoirs from which Guardino takes his title exemplify this choice of subject. Isaac Smith's 1848 *Reminiscences* is a brief account of his time in northern Mexico, previously undistinguished among literary histories or military ones.) In many ways the book follows a traditional pattern: it traces the progress of

[3] John S. D. Eisenhower, *So Far from God: The U.S. War with Mexico, 1846–1848* (New York: Random House, 1989); Ernesto Chávez, *The U.S. War with Mexico: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2007); Joseph Wheelan, *Invading Mexico: America's Continental Dream and the Mexican War* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2009); David Clary, *Eagles and Empire: The United States, Mexico, and the Struggle for a Continent* (New York: Bantam Books, 2009); Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Robert W. Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[4] Jesús Velasco Márquez, *La guerra del 47 y la opinión pública, 1845–1848* (Mexico City: SepSetentas, 1975); Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, ed., *México al tiempo de su guerra con Estados Unidos, 1846–1848* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997).

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the war from its origins in 1820s and 1830s Texas and eventually ends with a reevaluation of why Mexico lost. Along the way, however, Guardino emphasizes the emotional, physical, and material costs for the average men and women caught up in the conflict.

Those costs were unimaginable to most US and Mexican troops at the start of the war, as nationalistic sentiment in both countries guided public discourse. Guardino provides a thorough and compelling discussion of motivations, for example, beginning with the US reliance on the "citizen-soldier": ordinary citizens, "recruited specifically for this war, who would return to civilian society afterward" (91). While a common feature of major military engagements since, Guardino convincingly argues that deployment of citizen-soldiers in 1846 helped the US government to levy powerful cultural trends against its sister republic. The roles of patriotism, anti-Catholic sentiment, romantic conceptions of gender, racist antipathy, and of course belief in Manifest Destiny all come in for examination as evidenced in personal correspondence, diaries, and published reminiscences such as Isaac Smith's. Companion discussions of Mexico's rationale and preparations for war, both at governmental levels and among its citizenry, eloquently combine what seemed very clear at the outset with those elements that resisted prediction.

That many in Mexican society early on understood the potential scope and threat of US expansionism, given the nation's experience with Texas rebellion, is painfully clear in *The Dead March*. Similarly, Mexico's ability to field an equally well-equipped and well-organized army to defend its remaining territory against the United States, despite clear-eyed comprehensions of the threat they faced, is convincingly dispatched as ever having been a reality. Against that background, the author's discussions of the variety of attempted Mexican defenses reads painfully. Given how little most US citizens know of the war as a whole, who would be aware, for instance, that Mexico City's government was so concerned in 1847 about the gendered warfare of the approaching US Army that they authorized first, the evacuation of all nuns, and then later, the evacuation of all women living in the capital? Though Guardino writes that "no mass exodus ensued" (280), such deftly interwoven details imbue the narrative as a whole with a fitting somberness.

In this sense, Guardino's elegiac approach to his subject matter is apt: understanding "the disparity between the resources the two countries could mobilize to finance the war" (366) makes plain how many of its developments were a foregone conclusion. What truly distinguishes *The Dead March* from other histories is twofold: first, the insistence upon understanding the war as "tragic," the result of decisions made that could have, and perhaps should have, been made differently; and second, its agile integration of big picture politics (US expansionism, Mexican political discord) with suggestive, descriptive detail that brings this historical moment to life. Guardino balances the "who, what, when, where, and why" of the war in a manner that should satisfy scholars and also be amenable to an educated general public.

How to blend the "big picture" of national and international politics with the "little picture" details of individual actors and events is a balancing act also attempted by William S. Kiser in *Illusions of Empire: The Civil War and Reconstruction in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. The author takes as his subject the often-overlooked field of foreign relations, which in his view "had profound implications for the course of American empire: the interconnectedness of antebellum foreign policy, wartime diplomacy, and postwar Reconstruction across the entire U.S.-Mexico borderlands" (7). Each plays an important role in creating the *frontera* that both nations know today. Like *The Dead March*, *Illusions of Empire* opens with an illustrative story: two diplomatic envoys, Thomas Corwin and John T. Pickett, dispatched to Mexico by the warring presidents Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, respectively. Each man's journey is guided by the grandiose dreams underlying Union and Confederate ambitions. Hence Kiser's title: many on the Confederate side had harbored territorial desires for Mexico and other parts of Latin America for decades, seeing ample land and potentially millions of bodies to annex as part of the "peculiar

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

institution." Throughout his study, Kiser examines schemes for acquisition and expansion that will result "in a stand-alone Southern nation stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific" (32). The subject of Kiser's history is formed by how those plans or "illusions" emerged from the specific alchemy of the borderlands.

That alchemy represents both the strength and weakness of Kiser's study. In his own words, the book argues "for the centrality of Mexican regionalism in the course of hemispheric empire building" and also for understanding the means through which "the U.S.-Mexico border became a focus of international strategies in the mid-nineteenth century" (3, 4). Some of these strategic efforts used "formal channels" and a "conventional approach" (3, 4). But the most innovative and successful, in Kiser's view, took advantage of "the ways in which Mexico's north overlapped with America's Southwest in the contexts of diplomacy, politics, economics, and military operations" (4).

Illusions of Empire, then, makes the frontier into the center; it sees chaotic social relations as a source of political power brokering; and it represents groups beset by varying degrees of historical neglect as major players of the Civil War and the "Greater Reconstruction" that followed. Illuminating both "the overt and covert nature of diplomacy" as it unfolds from the antebellum era onward (6), Kiser makes a strong case that despite the overwhelming amount of Civil War scholarship, there remain constitutive aspects of the conflict that modern scholars fail to comprehend when they ignore *la frontera*. "The unconventional approaches to foreign relations along the border," he writes, "demonstrate the complex ways in which independent local actors can influence the course of global affairs and reveal that borderlands … can simultaneously enable and stifle imperial growth" (5).

The devil is in the details. "The sheer number of actors involved" is a challenge, states Kiser: "No less than two dozen military officers, a dozen Indian tribes or divisions of tribes, a dozen foreign consulate officials, half a dozen bandit groups, half a dozen filibusters, half a dozen revolutionary factions, half a dozen Mexican governors, half a dozen American governors, two U.S. presidents and their cabinets, a Confederate president and his cabinet, a Mexican president and his cabinet, a Mexican monarch and his court, and a French king and his court" (4).

This is the cast of characters whose actions, along with the import of those actions, Kiser seeks to unravel for his readers. But where his introductory and concluding chapters are admirable amalgams of clearly articulated, overarching argument, his dedicated chapters on those "local actors" and their outsized impact perhaps appeal most to specialists. Specific Union schemes to wrest control of Baja, Sonora, and Chihuahua from the Mexican government, for instance, or Confederate efforts to placate self-interested governmental officials in Nuevo León and Coahuila and thus protect lucrative trade for Texas, are convincingly and painstakingly explained and their respective players introduced. Few of these efforts however, or the men behind them, inspire interest in and of themselves. The personae of *Illusions of Empire* blend into one another as they seek different means of leveraging to their advantage "the precarious nature of political power and national sovereignty in … the borderlands" (35). Scholars pursuing research in specific locales, heretofore understudied Union or Confederate history, or historical figures in local governments or the diplomatic service, will find Kiser's deep dives of great use. Academics in need of more general knowledge regarding the war or borderlands history will likely find all they need in the book's framing chapters.

That the borderland has been both subject and site of more dynamic history than has been appreciated in academic circles becomes abundantly clear not just in *Illusions of Empire* but also in Kelly Lytle Hernández's *Bad Mexicans: Race, Empire, and Revolution in the Borderlands*. The title is a translation of an epithet used by Mexican president Porfirio Díaz and members of his inner circle directed toward *los magonistas*, or followers of Ricardo Flores Magón, an intellectual father of the Revolution (1910–1920). Flores

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Magón came to radical politics alongside several other figures fomenting Mexico's early twentieth-century sociopolitical upheaval, finding their catalysts in reading Marx, and getting arrested for various crimes against the authoritarian Díaz regime. In Flores Magón's case, his journey to revolutionary politics also included publishing the newspaper *Regeneración* with his brothers. But Ricardo eventually set his sights on action: educating the general Mexican populace in the long history of wrongs committed against them, and encouraging them to revolt for the "¡Tierra y libertad!" (land and liberty) owed to them. And one thing more: arming *el pueblo* so as to facilitate that revolt with more than words.

Although Flores Magón's legacy is well known throughout his homeland, he and his fellow "*malos Mexicanos*" have been understudied and neglected stateside. As Lytle Hernández tells their story, their actions and influence shape the course of the early twentieth century on both sides of the border. Just as *Illusions of Empire* excavates a complex interweaving of local, state, national, international, political, business, legal, and extralegal efforts to further mid-nineteenth-century wartime goals, *Bad Mexicans* similarly reconstructs an impressive array of actors and interests converging along *la frontera* some thirty and forty years after the Civil War and French Intervention. The book skillfully introduces us to the magonistas set against a backdrop of US imperial expansion, Porfiriato-era corruption, Mexican migration, nativism, political discord, the founding of the FBI, and lynching. "The history of the United States as a global power cannot be told without Mexico" (8), declares Lytle Hernández; "The rise of U.S. imperialism, the making of the American West, and rebellion against the color line are just three of the major themes in U.S. history that cannot be understood without Mexico and Mexicans . . . . [The magonistas'] primary target was not the United States, but their uprising, namely their insistence on winning 'Land and Liberty!' in Mexico, imperiled the laboratory of U.S. empire" (10). Thus the resonance of the insult "bad Mexicans": in a debunking of the prevailing racist presumptions in the United States of Mexican docility and lack of ambition (10), *malos Mexicanos* like the magonistas organized so as to challenge the status quo, demanding equity, dignity, and proper recompense for their *compatriotas*' labor.

With a roster of characters that is relatively small and infinitely fascinating, Lytle Hernández has composed an exhaustively researched history that in some ways reads like a novel and is hard to set aside. Individual chapters introduce readers not only to Ricardo Flores Magón but also to his equally dedicated brothers Jesús and Enrique, to comrades in the magonista ranks and in the marginalized sectors of Mexican society from which they hailed, and of course, to the magonista nemesis Porfirio Díaz. All are proverbially larger than life characters, but the magonistas converge around a shared creed: that "the Díaz administration is a den of thieves" (58), and that armed revolution is the only means to end a US-supported dictatorship well into its third decade. "Magón and the *magonistas*," explains Lytle Hernández, "were a threat, because they sought a wholesale political and economic revolution. They not only demanded Díaz's ouster; they demanded a strict limit on foreign investment in Mexico, protections for workers, and the return of the land seized by investors" (5). Such efforts see the Flores Magón brothers imprisoned in US jails and plans to defeat revolutionary figures hatched on US territory, as when "U.S. ambassador Henry Lane Wilson supported the coup [against Francisco Madero]. In fact, [Victoriano] Huerta and Félix Díaz concocted their coup in Wilson's office" (298). *Bad Mexicans* is an absorbing and also infuriating work of history. One cannot help but wonder, in an era of histrionic yet successful activism against "critical race theory" and attempts to diversify teaching of US history, how some contemporary political figures would react to a work that so thoroughly and fearlessly implicates nefarious behavior along *both* sides of the Rio Grande.

The imperative to rethink "forgotten wars," borders, and borderlands also inspires works set in disparate locales and histories. Even as Díaz, his stateside enablers, and the Magón brothers were staking out their positions in the Southwest, Cuban refugees

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

gathered in the Northeast United States to trouble their own literal and figurative boundaries. Carmen E. Lamas's *The Latino Continuum and the Nineteenth-Century Americas* takes as its subject a reconstructed history of texts and figures documenting Cuban writers, exiles, and freedom fighters and their own accounts of struggles for liberty. It opens with a scene of exiles reading and studying an early seventeenth-century poem, *Espejo de paciencia*, itself lost to readers for centuries before being discovered; it is eventually transcribed in yet another fragile and once-lost text and smuggled out of Cuba to refuge in New York. Thus Lamas pictures for us a little-known figure, Nestor Ponce de León, who "found himself in front of his fellow exiles piecing together Cuba's literary heritage as a means of planning the upcoming war of independence, literally building the nation from abroad, as Cubans and Latin Americans alike had done since the early 1800s" (2).

This scenario featuring Ponce de León encapsulates the continuum that Lamas theorizes throughout her admirable study: "I speak of a continuum that is constituted and comes about simultaneously in and beyond space and time, suggesting that Latina/os, their lives and their texts, represent a sort of identity that is not entirely Latin American and not entirely US American. Nor is it merely transnational, which is ultimately still tied to the geographic/spatial: rather, it is a sort of identity that simultaneously occupies multiple spatialities while inhabiting and crossing diverse temporal moments" (5).

Lamas's text recovers several figures who wrote mostly in Spanish and have been understudied or unknown within US Latino studies. That alone provides a great service to the field, and Lamas articulates persuasively how such works, along with their authors, might enable us to comprehend literary historical formations as that vibrant continuum. It is no surprise when Anzaldúa appears in the concluding chapter, one of several guides whom Lamas hopes her own readers will seek out in search of yet more ways of rethinking literary history (213). Cuba's protracted, brutal war for independence from Spain—one of many periods during which the United States intervened in Cuban self-determination—created its own *herida abierta*, still experienced both by those resident on the island as well as the sizeable worldwide Cuban diaspora.

If recent scholarly work examining the US-Mexico War and its aftermath prioritizes the role of the border in shaping that aftermath, related works focusing on the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries begin by asking what the border is now. Apart from its most basic and concrete function as a series of stops mediating flow between two nations, how do we know it? How should we understand its strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities as a concept as well as a political construct? The latter incarnation becomes important particularly for what binds together a recent spate of publications, that is, the dedication of the Trump administration to manipulating the US-Mexico border into an ever-potent turnout issue for their base. The forty-fifth US president and his "build the wall!" policies hover over all of the following studies. He appears in the introductions and/or conclusions of *North American Borders in Comparative Perspective*, a collection of essays from the social sciences edited by Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera and Victor Konrad; *Fencing In Democracy: Border Walls, Necrocitizenship, and the Security State* by Miguel Díaz-Barriga and Margaret E. Dorsey; Eric V. Meeks's *Border Citizens: The Making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona*, a revised edition of the 2007 original, whose new material reckons with this most recent of US history; and *Refugiados climáticos: Un gran reto del siglo XXI*, by Miguel Pajares. Though *Border Optics: Surveillance Cultures on the US-Mexico Frontier*, by Camilla Fojas, does not mention Trump by name, it is impossible to read her tome without being reminded of how the last administration bullishly approached this topic.

This is the ongoing aftermath of the US-Mexico War previously mentioned, as well as Anzaldúa's conception of *una herida abierta*: reading any of these studies alongside those of Guardino, Kiser, or Lytle Hernández illuminates just how profoundly the transfer of land from one country to another, the transfer of wealth and then eventually of people from one country to another, and the cementing of racialized attitudes toward myriad facets of

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

identity continues to influence the life experiences of millions. As Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey ask pointedly in *Fencing In Democracy*, referencing US approaches to border security, "What does it mean to live in a society that is in a relentless state of emergency?" (14). When these texts are paired with those taking the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as their focus, it becomes abundantly obvious that this "relentless state of emergency" has existed in some manner for nearly two hundred years.

North American Borders in Comparative Perspective begins by acknowledging a truism of border politics as it unfolds in the United States: that there exists more than one geographically expansive and politically consequential international border for the country. The question, of course, is in what ways that "other border" is consequential. "Our comparative perspective on North American borders," write editors and contributing authors Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera and Victor Konrad, "begins with selected stories to reveal the distinctive nature of first the overportrayed Mexico-U.S. border and then the largely overlooked Canada-U.S. border" (4). "The unbalanced and slanted view of the two borders" is one that each essay in the collection aims to redress, "seek[ing] commonalities, parallels, alignments and shared characteristics to enable a North American perspective" (4). Canada plays little to no role in the works included here so far, but in Correa-Cabrera and Konrad's collection, it matters not only for its own sake but also as an instructive foil for approaches to the southern border. "Why are these borders so different in an ostensibly fluid continent in the vanguard of globalization?," the editors ask in their introduction (9).

Citing Anzaldúa and other scholars, Correa-Cabrera and Konrad note that "borderlands is a time-honored concept with roots in the Bolton School of historical scholarship and significant explication in recent years by scholars and cultural activists" (11). As such, however, it remains a resonant concept primarily for the United States and Mexico. The editors' statement that "there are indications that policy makers in the highest level of government in Canada recognize the emergence of cross-border regions between Canada and the United States" (11) is undercut by their own discussion of the Trump administration and its manipulation of border politics a few pages earlier in this chapter (4–6). As long as the Migration Protection Protocols (the official name for the Department of Homeland Security's "Remain in Mexico" program) are in effect, as well as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Title 42 (authorizing the immediate expulsion of any and all persons attempting to enter the United States, at will, due to the prevalence of contagious disease), and Mexico's own Plan Frontera Sur (dictating peremptory deportation of asylum seekers from Central America, even those attempting simply to cross through Mexico to the United States), the southern border will retain its status as an "overportrayed," militarized, and hypersurveilled space for millions.

Several essays in *North American Borders in Comparative Perspective* illustrate this fact of life eloquently. Rick Van Schoik's "Twenty-First-Century North American Borders" uses the 2016 election of Donald Trump as well as the Brexit movement as context for its discussion, noting that both "are graphic illustrations of the rise of populist nationalism that has consequences for borders worldwide" (99). Taking the question of sovereignty as his focus, the author observes that the resurgence of such nationalisms illuminates how "borders today are perhaps the most dynamic component of international relations" (101) and yet are fundamentally misunderstood and thus mistreated in contemporary politics. For instance, "the emergence of stateless actors as power players means that more is really at stake [in comprehending the role of borders] and that no one really has any control" (118). "Transborder Spaces and Regional Identity in North America," by Francisco Lara-Valencia, asserts "the historically contingent nature of all identity formation and cross-border regionalism processes," using case studies along both the Canada-US and Mexico-US borders to examine what is fluid and what remains stubbornly the same in those processes (144).

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Christopher Wilson's chapter, "Maturing Cross-Border Cooperation for Economic Development," looks at "local and state-level cross-border collaboration" as a means of improving or maintaining growth and standards of living in borderlands (301); while "Comparative Examination of Binational Watershed Research in North America," by Christopher Brown, presents the author's ongoing research into shared water resources and challenges both in the Cascadia Corridor Region (in the US Northwest and the Canadian province of British Columbia) and the Tijuana River Watershed, managed by both the United States and Mexico. The essay ends by questioning how much, or how stridently, one can even speak of "a North American watershed gestalt"—a shared comprehension of what the issues are in water management—let alone how best to address them for the survival of multiple nations and their peoples (355). Along with the other essays presented in the volume, these make plain that one border region is not like the other, even without considering the machinations of a former US president.

Such is also the case in Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey's *Fencing In Democracy: Border Walls, Necrocitizenship, and the Security State*, and in Camilla Fojas's *Border Optics: Surveillance Cultures on the US-Mexico Frontier.* Both take as their subjects an aspect of life in *la frontera* that results from "the normalization and proliferation of border militarization" (Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey, 11). The former uses the border wall, literally and figuratively, as a means of understanding the manipulation of citizenship under this bellicose transformation at the border. For Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey, this is more specifically a "necrocitizenship": "To understand what a state's practice of rebordering, violence, and exception does to its citizenry, we introduce the concept of necrocitizenship. Necrocitizenship focuses both on militarization imposed by the state and on the ways it is regenerated within local cultural practices and subjectivities" (11).

As anthropologists, the authors are keenly interested in the adaptation and internalization of necrocitizenship by communities, and their analysis of these processes is skillfully done. Thus necrocitizenship is further defined as "a heuristic to explicate … interrelated political and cultural practices" (12). These include the obsession of the state and its agents with "exclusion and death" rather than with "life and the overall health of its citizenry"; "the deterritorialization of mexicano/a and Mexican American identity" so that such persons are always depicted and comprehended as somehow outside national belonging, as "extranationals in the public sphere"; and "patriotic citizenship" enacted by Mexican Americans within the borderlands as a means of countering the exclusionary practices of the state, thus manifesting in an easily visible manner that one indeed belongs (12).

The question of belonging underlies each of the studies that investigate more recent history. As Mae M. Ngai explained in *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, belonging is and always has been state business: "Immigration policy is constitutive of Americans' understanding of national membership and citizenship, drawing lines of inclusion and exclusion that articulate a desired composition … of the nation."[5] What Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey achieve so impressively is a discussion of that "desired composition" that reveals how less powerful communities interact with and sometimes internalize yet always in some ways resist the exclusionary endeavors of those with greater political heft. With the anthropologist's keen eye for the illustrative and emotional impact of storytelling, the authors flesh out their decidedly academic jargon with chapters devoted to memorable persons, events, and images.

At the El Veterano Conjunto Festival in south Texas, for instance, predominantly Mexican American families celebrate typical elements of their Latino heritage—food, music, and arts—alongside proud demonstrations of their support for and sometimes

[5] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

involvement in US military, police, and border patrol (65–70). For example, the activist Reynaldo Anzaldúa, who is introduced as a critic of border militarization and a US Army veteran skilled in deploying the symbols of his belonging as a means of enabling his critique, "intentionally dons red-white-and-blue baseball caps that mark his former membership in the ... army" (5).

But in contrast to the grassroots level, as it were, of small-town celebrations and local activists, Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey also devote chapters to the power of Fox News, for instance, in disseminating "borderlands-as-war zone" propaganda and also in discrediting critique coming from the same Latino communities so careful to exhibit the signs of their patriotism. While the disciplinary lingo of *Fencing In Democracy* makes plain that the study is intended primarily for a scholarly audience—no general history or engrossing-as-a-novel attempts here—that is something of a disservice to the book's subject matter. One of the strengths of Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey's work is that they are adept at explaining the jargon and then "doing the work" to make their research absorbing, thought-provoking, and comprehensible to those well outside their field, such as this reviewer. Perhaps future research from this pair can extend even further afield for a readership.

Fojas's *Border Optics* treads the same ground as *Fencing In Democracy*, "explor[ing] a vital aspect of the rise of the surveillance state through the expansion of border control and surveillance with a focus on the paradigmatic border between the Global North and the Global South, the US-Mexico border" (10). (What becomes obvious in *Comparative North American Borders*, then, represents the premise from which Fojas's work begins: this "paradigmatic border" is fundamentally different from the US-Canada one.) But where the previous work examined citizenship as pressured by "necropolitics," *Border Optics* concerns itself with "the highly mediated visual field" of the borderlands (10). That field is referenced by its own newly coined term, "borderveillance," which "describes the operations of a vast network and infrastructure of oversight, control, and management of regions that symbolize the bounded and secured nation, marking these regions as permanent fields of the visible. It signals a booming security-industrial complex that includes entertainment media, local and federal policing, prisons and detention centers, the aerospace industry, and all manner of security-technology industries" (29). "The drama of borderveillance," declares Fojas, "infuses everyday life," not just in *la frontera* but throughout the country, and is articulated and particularly envisioned through the above industries and technologies, so that the threat and the necessity of the borderlands is felt well away from its physical territory (29). Thus, in video games, "border reality television series" (46), and media technology put to use by governmental forces such as the border patrol, "migrants are only legible as criminals" (57).

Hence the border is visually transformed into a reductive space of good versus evil, populated by good guys (those who belong) and bad guys (those who do not). Narratives of "wild west mythology" dating back to the nineteenth century now permeate visual representations of the border and its natural spaces, again in reality TV (shows on the Discovery, National Geographic, and Animal Planet channels, all set along the southern border) and in National Park Service philosophy. Fojas quotes "Larry Parkinson, former deputy assistant secretary for law enforcement and security at the Department of the Interior," as opining that "the best thing you can do for the environment is to have control of the border" (113). The author's range of sources is vast, but all are read through the lens of borderveillance, with its fantasy of "total surveillance and control of movement through all ports of entry" (147). In case this sounds fantastical, Fojas demonstrates that it is not, noting that the former senator Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas once suggested that 24/7 surveillance of the entire southern border become "the standard" for which the federal government should aim (147). In *Border Optics*, Fojas persuasively argues that this dream is made a material target every day by some governmental entity, themselves supported by myriad, well-marketed visions of a perfectly protected, closed off nation.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

If the US-Mexico border is "the paradigmatic border between the Global North and the Global South" (Fojas, 10), then what Eric V. Meeks's *Border Citizens: The Making of Indians, Mexicans, and Anglos in Arizona* recounts is the mess of abiding by prevailing conceptions of national identity, place, and belonging when one's personal and communal history defies the power of a recognized dividing line. This edition is a revised version of the original 2007 publication, revisited so as to take into account the rise of nativism and anti-Latino sentiment in Arizona state politics and to discuss Donald Trump's successful adoption of border crisis rhetoric. Meeks's intriguing study sets its sites on the experiences of Indigenous and Latino citizens in Arizona, many of whom live in areas where "no clear racial order dividing monolithic groups" has ever existed (17); thus residents find themselves rejecting or warily adapting to efforts to make them fit into external conceptualizations. Meeks discusses the "Yaqui siblings Antonia and Rosalio Moisés Valenzuela," for example, who traverse the southern border and settle alternately in parts of Mexico or Arizona in response to familial needs and historical events (71). As Meeks explains, the brother and sister "had little sense of a national identity relative to either Mexico or the United States. Instead, their life histories are filled with references to kin and local communities scattered around both sides of the border" (72).

The Valenzuelas exemplify an inefficacy of the border and of external conceptions of national identity; even as they cross this boundary, living in Sonora or living in Arizona, neither the border nor the governments who maintain it decisively tell them who they are. Another borderlands resident, Julia Bustamante, also defies two national powers in comprehending who she and her family are: "My husband was born on [Tohono O'odham] lands to the North, and worked on both sides . . . . I remember when there was no boundary. We O'odham just came and went as we pleased" (75–76). Thus the irony of Meeks's title: "border citizens" such as the Valenzuela siblings and Julia Bustamante live in the border but do not locate their identity in post-1848 actualizations of its being. Meeks's chapters also include discussion of how developments from the Indian New Deal of the 1930s to the rising Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s impacted identity among Arizona's different peoples. In all of them, "the fuzziness of the boundaries between Indian and Mexican identity" challenges articulations of race and citizenship dominant in other parts of the United States and Mexico (44). This "fuzziness" does not prevent outside entities from trying to enforce unfamiliar racial constructions in this part of the borderlands, but it represents a significant complication and even hindrance; the border that is so charged and both materially and conceptually potent in the admirable studies of Fojas, Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey, and Correa-Cabrera and Konrad reveals itself here as vulnerable.

Vulnerability of a different sort is the subject of Miguel Pajares's *Refugiados climáticos*, a call to arms in the same vein as David Wallace-Wells's *Uninhabitable Earth*.[6] Though its title does not declare the study's kinship to those already discussed in this review, in many ways Pajares's work represents the culmination of the upheavals analyzed by Guardino, Kiser, and Lytle Hernández. Likewise, the environmental peril exhaustively documented by this author represents the outcome of a social brutality with similarities to that examined by Díaz-Barriga and Dorsey and especially Fojas. Regardless of its title, Pajares's work is a vital addition to borderlands studies.

Refugiados climáticos is as firmly anchored in the contemporary moment as academic scholarship can be, incorporating into its discussion the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration, and European failures to deal humanely with African and Middle Eastern migration. In the author's view, as horrific as it is, the toll the pandemic has taken on the world pales in comparison with what awaits us: "The COVID-19 pandemic

[6] David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming* (New York: Tim Duggan Books/Penguin Random House, 2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

has shown us how vulnerable we are when nature turns against us because of the harm we have done to her. Nevertheless, the pandemic's devastating capacity exists on a much smaller scale than that of climate change" (16).[7] In the first few chapters of his work, Pajares concerns himself with what can already be seen of "the concrete effects of the climate emergency" (16). But even as these beginning chapters clearly and succinctly review the measure of climate change and its existing impact on global migration, Pajares hints at the larger specter hanging over his work, and over mankind: "We shall see that the available data regarding environmental mobility deals with those displaced by rapid change phenomena," he writes, "such as hurricanes, torrential rains, and flooding" (17). But it is what we do not know precisely, and what cannot be measured or predicted perfectly, that stands out most somberly: "There is hardly any data regarding those displaced by slow change phenomena, such as drought and desertification. Nonetheless, it is these phenomena that create the largest internal displacements, and they remain well hidden among what is known as 'rural to urban migration' patterns" (17). The latter chapters of Pajares's study deal with these unknowns and how to approach them using what data is already in plain view.

What does this have to do with borderlands or the aftershocks of 1846–1848? Everything, because as Pajares notes, the United States is the main recipient of those displaced by climate change from their homes in Latin America and the Caribbean (213). Droughts in Central America already have had devastating effects on agricultural production there; they also play a role in decreasing the amount of arable land in Mexico, contributing to what climate scientists call "desertification" (209). These are examples of the slow change that Pajares discusses; but seemingly isolated, individual events such as hurricanes—themselves becoming more common and creating greater damage—also drive migration, as seen in Hurricane María's impact in Puerto Rico in 2017 (213). Yet, as Pajares consistently reminds his readers, the challenge is not just what we have already seen occur in Latin America, as well as in parts of Africa and South Asia, but what projections tell us must occur if climate change is not halted. Pajares cites studies suggesting that Mexico City, for example, will contend with heat waves and water scarcity so grave within the next four decades that migration will trend away from the capitol, not toward it (216). Current figures put the city's population at just under nine million. Where will this exodus go?

The most striking element of *Refugiados climáticos* is not any quantitative projection but rather a concluding section in which Pajares speaks directly to his reader. Most section titles within chapters have had pragmatically descriptive monikers, but this one does not. Having previously discussed what preparations the wealthy nations of the Global North appear to be taking not just to stop climate change, but to receive millions of refugees displaced by its impacts, Pajares pens a section titled "The Other Option Is to Kill Them": "I hope that you, dear reader, know enough to pardon me for the provocative title of this section. But I believe that as things are going, the option of mass death for climate refugees will be considered at some point. And furthermore, I believe that states within powerful and wealthy countries are preparing themselves for that eventuality" (257).

What follows is a brief discussion of Hannah Arendt and the groundbreaking work she published almost sixty years ago, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Pajares revisits Arendt's coverage of Adolf Eichmann's trial for WWII crimes and her observations regarding the ease with which Eichmann and others in Nazi Germany convinced themselves to allow horrible things to transpire all around them. Pajares then poses a discomfiting and necessary question: Are the rich and powerful nations of the world, including the United States, launched on the same path, so that they—we—will also allow

[7] *Refugiados climáticos* is written in Spanish. In accordance with *LARR* house style, I have done my best to translate Pajares's concise and often eloquent prose.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cruelty and inhumanity when faced with millions of refugees forced from their now uninhabitable homes? (261). When read in the company of the works reviewed here, it is a frightening query to entertain. But Pajares retains hope. "We need to decide now what type of society we want our children and grandchildren to live in," he writes. But "another future is still possible" (267).

Gloria Anzaldúa's influence is felt throughout all these recent studies, even in those few texts, like Pajares's, where her name is unmentioned. Lamas's description of her project in *The Latino Continuum*, after all, encapsulates the Anzaldúan imperative to decouple the meaning of borders from their seemingly simple material being. Lamas characterizes her subject as "not entirely Latin American and not entirely US American," existing across "multiple spatialities" and "crossing diverse temporal moments" (5). This sounds very much like the borderlands psyche of which Anzaldúa wrote and that all of these texts, in their various fields and subjects, do their part to illuminate.

María Carla Sánchez is Associate Professor of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at University of North Carolina Greensboro, where she teaches nineteenth-century literature. Her work in progress focuses on US and Mexican writing from the 1846–1848 war, literary genres, and social protest.

Cite this article: Sánchez, María Carla (2023). The US-Mexico War, *la Frontera*, and Their Afterlives. *Latin American Research Review* **58**, 972–984. https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2022.78 Published online by Cambridge University Press