

EMERGENT INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES AT THE U.S-MEXICO
BORDERLANDS

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The creation of the U.S.–Mexico border was a long political process that began in the sixteenth century when England, Spain, France, and many indigenous groups were vying for control of North America, and ended in the mid-nineteenth century when the United States gained a large portion of Northern Mexico through war, annexation, and purchase (Martinez 1996). The Mexican War (1846-1848)—or the War of North American Invasion as it is known in Mexico—is usually considered the defining moment for the creation of today’s border. Yet now, more than 150 years after the signing of the Mesilla Treaty (Gadsden Purchase), which effectively finalized the location of the border, anti-immigrant militants continue to frame the border as broken, inciting popular opinion and policy makers to support completing “the danged fence” (McCain 2010). This discourse reinforces anti-immigrant sentiment and produces a persuasive logic rooted in ‘others’ as not belonging to the nation-state (see, for example, Huntington 2004). Without regard for indigenous peoples, historical migration patterns, or for changing definitions of citizenship, these anti-immigrant voices are often fixated on the nation-state as the only means for discerning who counts today (M. Anderson 1996).

Scholars examining alternate forms of citizenship today often link discussions of citizenship to discussions of identity. The linkage is concerned with how people see themselves as citizens, how they act upon their citizenship, and how they narrate their understanding of themselves in other aspects of life (Jones and Gaventa 2002, 13; Isin

and Wood 1999).¹ The assumption is that the concepts of citizenship and identity are complementary and that each person and group experiences and practices citizenship in different ways (Mouffe 1992; Isin and Wood 1999). To elaborate, I turn to Chantal Mouffe's (1992) oft-cited conceptualisation of identity as a starting point for discussing the linking of citizenship and identity. Mouffe argues that scholars should consider identity as a collection of 'subject positions' (such as female, Mexican, Muslim, etc.), each of which is only a portion of one's identity, and each portion influences the other. For instance, a Mexican woman and a Canadian woman—while both women—might understand the idea of being female differently (Mouffe 1992; see also Jones and Gaventa 2002, 14). Consequently, one can view both women's subject positions in relation to the dominant identities around them. It is subject positions that influence their overall worldview. Thus, individuals produce a sense of group political identity (citizenship) through identification with others who hold similar subject positions. In this case, a "citizenship" identity becomes dominant when a particular subject position is drawn upon in a politicised citizenship action (for example, a women's movement). Mouffe merges citizenship and identity in a way that advances a "master political identity" (1992, 12).

In a different conception of citizenship as an identity, Judith N. Shklar (1995) suggests that there are inherent contradictions about the meanings of American citizenship—the case of slavery in the United States provides a prime example. While the United States was asserting inclusive political rights, the country systemically denied those rights to slaves: denying them the right to vote and the right to

¹ Identity scholarship asserts that the way people understand themselves as citizens has an important effect on their awareness of their rights and obligations and, more importantly, on how, why and whether they participate as citizens (Jones and Gaventa 2002: 13).

earn. “Under these conditions,” she writes, “citizenship in America has never been just a matter of agency and empowerment, but also of social standing as well” (Shklar 1995, 2). The central tenet of her argument is that American citizenship is both a matter of public respect and of social standing (as opposed to using the term status). Furthermore, she argues that some citizens are still denied full citizenship—the right to vote and the right to earn—on the basis of their race, class and/or gender. Thus, one’s standing differentiates full citizens from those who are unfit for full citizenship. The struggle for citizenship involves, then, a continuing battle to destroy the barriers of full citizenship, which remains exclusive in the United States. As Shklar writes, “There is nothing equal about social standing in general. Nothing more unequally distributed than social respect and prestige. It is only citizenship perceived as a natural right that bears a promise of equal political standing in a democracy” (1995, 57).

Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s examination of Mexicans in the Southwest after the U.S.–Mexico War is also revealing of the inclusive/exclusive potential to discriminate in the everyday.² The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war in 1848, guaranteed that Mexicans who stayed in the newly acquired territories of the now U.S. Southwest would enjoy full rights as U.S. citizens. At the local level, however, their treatment was mixed. Some state constitutions granted full citizenship status to ‘white’ citizens of Mexico but not necessarily to those determined as “mestizo”—or those being of indigenous descent—placing Mexican Americans in a precarious situation. Even those who were able to ‘buy’ their status were nonetheless often viewed as inferior.

² Glenn offers three compelling case studies, spanning the 1870 through the 1920s that examine political and social relations between whites and blacks in the South, Mexicans in the Southwest and Japanese in Hawaii, and particularly how the often tumultuous relationships shaped ideas of citizenship.

Also enlightening is that Mexicans, like 'blacks' in the South and the Japanese in Hawaii, all found various ways to challenge the exclusionary practices of citizenship. For instance, Mexicans were able to create separate spaces through social, cultural, and mutual aid societies. They also organised cultural festivals, celebrated Mexican holidays, sang native songs, and produced vernacular presses. Finally, they participated in protests and strikes often bringing together Mexican and Mexican American workers. As Glenn writes, they began "to advance a concept that is now called cultural citizenship—the right to maintain cultures and languages that differ from those of the majority without compromising membership in the American community or the civil, political, or social rights attached to membership" (2002, 189; emphasis mine).

Cultural Citizenship

Redefining citizenship is an ambitious project; however, the authors in the *Latino Cultural Citizenship* (1997) volume do not seek to redefine it. Instead, they seek to reveal the parts of citizenship that have been overtaken by legalese including rights, culture, empowerment, community, and membership. In addition, the works make clear the connection of citizenship to race, and particularly to power. The authors challenge us to consider the ways Latina/os in the United States are denied legal citizenship and ways to practise it by specifically examining and illustrating the actions and voices of Latina/o communities themselves. According to William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, "Cultural citizenship names a range of social practices, which taken together, claim and establish a distinct social space for Latinos in this country" (1997, 1).³ Hence, the authors

³ The argument the authors make is that this distinct social space is fluid and continual, and that the complexities of the Latina/o experience in the United States is at the same time racial, cultural, and linguistic. They also point out that

examine the (sup)posed threat by Latina/os to the economic, political, and cultural character of the United States, primarily because Latina/os are often deemed as disuniting and devaluing U.S. culture, if not contributing to a mutation of the American ideal (Flores and Benmayor 1997, 4). In short, Latina/os are “different”. In terms of the cultural citizenship approach, however, the authors see difference as a resource, not as a threat. The authors also contend that citizenship itself, is a very complex matter given that Latina/os were and are treated as second-class even when they are born in this country or branded as illegal when they are not. Thus, their point is not only to examine the cultural politics of citizenship but also to illustrate that citizenship rights and human rights cannot be separated.

The term “cultural citizenship” is attributed to Renato Rosado who criticized interpretations of culture as stagnant and for misrepresenting the direction and dynamics of actual cultural change (1985, 1989; cited in Flores and Benmayor 1995, 11). To examine cultural citizenship, the authors, in short, also introduced the concepts of agency, empowerment, and community as necessary for the social (re)production of citizenship forms. Flores and Benmayor continue, “Cultural citizenship can be thought of as a broad range of activities of everyday life through which Latinos and other groups claim space in society and eventually claim rights” (1995, 15). Thus, the concept of cultural citizenship goes beyond existing theories of acculturation, assimilation, multiculturalism, and pluralism. In addition, cultural citizenship incorporates a number of cultural practices that become central to affirmation for citizenship rights.

conquest and colonization are often overlooked when considering that the American continent is also the Latina/o “homeland.”

In a further elaboration of the concept of ‘cultural citizenship’, Renato Rosaldo’s *Cultural Citizenship in Island Southeast Asia* (2003) is about indigenous peoples and belonging in the hinterlands of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The authors of the edited volume offer examples of how hinterland minorities “embrace, challenge, and transform imposed ideologies and policies” of the “electoral politics, national language, religious inclusion, educational access, and codification of national law” of their respective nation-states (Rosaldo 2003, 2). Rosaldo writes, “In Latino contexts the term cultural calls attention to the range of claims that citizens (especially groups subordinated by race, gender, and class) make against the state” (2003, 3). He continues:

The term citizenship ranges from the formal rights of citizens with respect to the state, such as voting, to more colloquial or vernacular matters that revolve, for example, around the distinction between first- and second- class citizens or the desire for recognition as a full member of a group. The contexts for the latter issues thus include the interactions in everyday environments, such as the workplace, churches, schools, and friendship and family networks. (Rosaldo 2003, 3)

In this case, cultural citizenship is seen as a continual process striving for and resisting belonging and not belonging. Important to the overall theme of the book is Rosaldo’s development of Clifford Geertz (1973) and Benedict Anderson’s (1991) conceptions of nationalism. He takes issue with Geertz concept of “primordial sentiments” as “constructed to seem natural” (2003, 4) and takes issue with Anderson for ignoring minorities and non-elites in his oft-cited discussion about nation-building by focusing solely on metropolitans and the elite.

Building upon the concept of cultural citizenship, Eric V. Meeks (2007) examines citizenship in terms of racial subordination, and the cultural politics of resisting that subordination in Arizona’s

borderlands. For Meeks, the once fluid racial categories of Arizona's borderlands were fixed by the project of nation building, as the territory was both rapidly moving toward capitalist development and statehood. The study underscores how citizenship in the borderlands has been obscured by strict racial categorisation. Hence, the citizenship rights of non-white Arizonans—the indigenous and ethnic Mexicans—suffered greatly.⁴ These groups were often relegated to either a second-class citizenship status or even regarded as non-citizens—a status born of racism and nativist sentiment. “Groups such as the Yaquis, Tohono O’odham, and ethnic Mexicans,” writes Meeks, “became ‘border citizens’—people whose rights of belonging were in question, leaving them on the margins of the national territory and of the American society” (2007, 11). What is more important, however, is that these groups, sometimes together and sometimes against each other, continuously challenged white structural dominance. He continues, “They were ‘border citizens’ both because of restrictions imposed on them and because they were redefining with it meant to belong to the U.S.” (Meeks 2007, 11).⁵

⁴ It is important to note that Meeks and others (see Gutierrez 1995) exemplify how Mexican American and Anglo relations worked at conflicting levels. To protect their citizenship rights, Mexican Americans often made claims to whiteness, and in many cases Mexican Americans *were* legally white. Yet, Mexican Americans were effectively nonwhite when claiming these rights.

⁵ David G. Gutiérrez (1999) offers perspectives on the complex formation of widely held nationalist attitudes and the political orientations of people in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, to also include *non*-cooperation. Gutiérrez argues that ethnic Mexicans were forced to adapt to increasingly sharp racial, cultural, and class distinctions in the United States. Adaptations included collective identity and solidarity as to claim new forms of nationality and citizenship (Gutiérrez 1999, 487). Gutiérrez continues “ethnic Mexicans were increasingly forced to devise defensive strategies of adaptation and survival in an intermediate, ‘third’

Similarly, with southern Arizona's borderlands as the setting, Katherine Benton-Cohen (2009) examines the racial structures and sheds light on how these structures have shaped the current immigration debate and in particular how they have defined citizenship.⁶ She writes, "At the border, 'American' was and is simultaneously a local, national, racial, and ideological category" (Benton-Cohen 2009, 7; emphasis mine). Examining how the groups and outside forces such as the market historically constructed notions of citizenship, she suggests that white identity—itsself an identity open to various interpretations—and the various privileges that come with the identity, is consequently intertwined with the term 'American'. As such, whiteness is often utilised to define citizenship, and hence exclude non-white groups from certain rights and from particular places. We are left with some hope however, as Benton-Cohen concludes, "though racial and citizenship formations have an overwhelming and heartbreaking command in our lives, these conditions have changed" (2009, 274). Indeed, cultural citizenship is relevant here to emergent identities, particularly as a more amorphous cultural and social notion of belonging.

Chicana/o Identities and Indigeneity

The U.S.–Mexico borderlands are, at the same time, culturally distinct from and culturally a part of the United States and Mexico. As such,

social space that was located in the interstices between the dominant national and cultural systems of both the United States and Mexico" (Gutiérrez 1995, 488).

⁶ "Are you an American, or are you not?" These are words spoken by Cochise County Sheriff Harry Wheeler's in his infamous Bisbee Deportation round-ups, and these words drive Benton-Cohen's (2009) study. Building upon the scholarship that discusses the formation of race and nation in the United States, Benton-Cohen looks at the interactions among the various ethnic subpopulations in Cochise County; particularly, Indians, Mexicans, and Europeans.

the borderlands continue to be an area where its 'citizens' customarily accept it as a cultural, political, and an economic space while simultaneously denying that space, by figuratively and literally building fences (see Vélez-Ibáñez 1996, 4-5). Symbolising the inherent contradiction of the borderlands is the question of what it means to be 'Hispanic' in the United States. Hispanics or Latina/os are white, they are black, they are Asian, they are indigenous, and they are multiple parts of these groupings in various combinations. Moreover, as part of the larger Latina/o categorisation, Mexican-Americans are both Mexican and American, and in many cases can and will self-identify under a number of changing and interpretive categories. These emergent identities beg the question as to whether Hispanics and Latina/os are an ethnic group, primarily because most are of mixed ancestry. Another issue is that Latina/os are often forced choose the traditional racial categories employed in the United States, which privileges whiteness over blackness and indigeneity. Finally, Mexican-Americans as mixed peoples or Mestiza/os are not only of indigenous heritage but are also often indigenous to the borderlands.⁷ When it comes to citizenship, the perceived threat is indigeneity—brown skin, indigenous cultures, languages, and so on. In other words, it is the otherness of the Mexican-American as an 'Indian' not a European that often makes them not belong to any particular citizenship regime, though the borderlands are theirs.

How Americans view Mexicans, and vice versa, is not at issue, but how belonging to the borderlands becomes associated with being the Other. This is an important issue, given that Mexican-Americans can both belong to the borderlands and are often 'other' to either side of the border—not considered fully Mexican or American. An examination of Mexican-Americans is an important point of entry for

⁷ See Harris's discussion on Creole communities in this volume.

a deeper discussion of citizenship issues in the borderlands. I am not, however, saying simply that being Mexican-American is the alternative-citizenship. Instead, I have set out to map a conceptual space in which we as scholars can engage in new conversations around the construction of citizenship.⁸ Mexican-Americans, or specifically in this case Chicano/as, can open a dialogue about the system to change the status and meaning of what is the held view of citizenship.⁹

Chicano/a identity is one that often focuses on the political nature of the group and of self, and moreover, one that often privileges an indigenous view of self and group. Implicit in the political overtones of Chicanismo is the idea that for many Chicano/as, the borderlands are contested grounds. Many Chicano/a scholars view the borderlands as a site of political and cultural conflict—a contested terrain shaped by changing individual and collective definitions of belonging and not belonging to the borderlands (see, for example, Vigil 1998). For this reason, many Chicano/as often feel that it is tougher to be a Mexican-American than to be a Mexican or an American, because on both sides of the border, they are often viewed with negative stereotypes. The

⁸ What is understood as reality is socially constructed should not suggest that these constructions of reality do not mirror, perform, and reify relations of power. Social constructions illustrate how certain agents play a privileged role in the (re)production of these realities.

⁹ Dependent on bias, there will always be a variety of definitions for the term Chicano/a. The scholarly world, at large, has come to view the term Chicano/a as a political term. As a distinctive ‘identity,’ Chicano/a identity is relatively young, having taken shape in two generations or so after the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexico War in 1848. Until the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, Mexican-Americans were virtually invisible. The Chicano Movement added widespread consciousness-raising with regard to the identity of Mexican-Americans. The outcomes of this new self-awareness and struggle for identity informed a history of Chicano/as that went beyond 1848 (the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo) to the emblematic year of 1492.

main issue for many Chicano/as is the belief that the creation of the 1848 border split them up—and made them hyphenated Americans.¹⁰ Chicano/as thus are embodiments of a complex fate shared by those born ‘other -American’, hybrids always living in the hyphen. As Benjamin Alire Saenz suggests, however, searching for an identity and accusing Chicano/as of playing identity politics is wrong as everybody engages in identity politics (1997, 73-75). He rhetorically poses, “Why is identity politics inescapable? Because we live in a shitty, disgusting world that produces and reproduces appalling inequalities, a society that helps create suspicions of ‘others’” (Alire Saenz 1997, 79).

The Chicano/a thus becomes important to the discussion of the possibilities of an alternative-citizenship, primarily because Chicano/as are said to span two nation-states.¹¹ As James Diego Vigil writes, “There are books on Mexico and works on the American Southwest, but few books attempt to grapple with and unravel the complex strands of Chicanos, as the ‘in-between’ people, who straddle both nations with a thin borderline separating the two” (1998, 2).

The proximity of Mexico to the United States is illustrative of Chicano/as’ problematic relationship to traditional forms of citizenship. Adding a feminist dimension, Norma Alarcón et al. write that, “the nation-state sharpens the defining lines of citizenship for women, racialized ethnicities, and sexualities in the construction of a socially stratified society” (1999, 1; see also Irigaray 1985, 171). In other words, citizenship vis-à-vis the nation-state is, at the same time, the denial and consolidation of sexual and racial difference. In the same vein, Laura Elisa Pérez continues:

¹⁰ Most Mexican-Americans, however, are descended from immigrants and not from the inhabitants of the 1848 borderlanders.

¹¹ Here, I am using the term Chicano/a interchangeably with the term Mexican-American.

Chicana/o cultural practices have operated in disordering, profoundly disturbing ways with respect to dominant social and cultural, spatial and ideological topographies of the “proper” in the United States. Cultural practices that code themselves as “Chicana/o” function as paradoxes within the ordering logic of dominant U.S. discourse, for they bear the identifying graffiti of a tenacious, socially and economically overdetermined biculturality, so do they operate bidiscursively, articulated both within and without the oppressive ideological territories of “Occupied America. (1999, 19)

The Chicana feminist critique is a useful starting point for rethinking citizenship away from a solely binary opposition between ‘us and them’, to questions of difference, power, and knowledge (Aldama and Quiñonez 2002; see also, Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Anzaldúa 1987; Alarcón 1997; Trujillo 1998). In the process of challenging existing citizenship paradigms, a new political identity—a borderlands identity—emerges to challenge both the racism of Anglo-American feminism and the sexism of ethnic nationalist movements.¹² An emergent border identity is also frequently used to explain the problems with confining and separating human communities, and to explain efforts to break from the confinement and separation.

Reverberating the arguments, Arturo J. Aldama and Naomi H. Quiñonez write, “The U.S.–Mexico border zone is a site that is lived and expressed by those who reside in the physical/discursive margins generated by the edge of two nation states” (2002, 1; emphasis mine). They argue that for more than 500 years, the Americas have attempted to deal with colonial and neocolonial subjugation, and for more than 150 years, Chicanos/as have dealt with a continued subjugation.¹³ One

¹² A borderlands identity should not assume just one singular identity, but instead assumes multiple and fluid identities.

¹³ Like the year 1492, the year 1848 marks an important moment in which Chicano/a lives were dramatically changed. Of course, if we are to be historically

way subjugation is dealt with is through cultural productions that have created a discursive space (through art, media, music, and other forms of popular cultural production) to articulate various forms of resistance to physical barriers. As the authors point out, it is “a resistance to the multiplicity of oppression across race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Aldama and Quiñonez 2002, 3). Arturo J. Aldama continues, “Chicana/o border studies, devoted to understanding the complex dialectics of racialized, subaltern, feminist, and diasporic identities and the aesthetic politics of hybrid mestiza/o cultural production, is at the vanguard of historical, anthropological, literary, cultural, artistic, and theoretical inquiry” (2002, 11).

Chicano/a Studies

For many Mexican and other Latin Americans, crossing the border into the United States not only means crossing from one country to another but crossing from one system of classification (national/regional) to another (pan-ethnic). This is to the extent where many border-crossers experience ethnogenesis, whereby they are often seen as sharing a common ethnic identity, despite diversity.¹⁴ Crossing boundaries, then, is characterised by crossing not only into a different state or territory, but crossing into different cultural systems (Anderson 1996, 4–6). Indigenous hybrid cultures have emerged that are shunned by both hegemonic centers. Yet, the search for identity

specific about identity, Chicano/a might not be the best term here, since, in those times it was not used.

¹⁴ In addition, the already complex Mexican-American ethnic identity was compounded in the 1980s when the U.S. government began to use a new official and encompassing classification—Hispanic. The Hispanic label included all Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Central and South Americans, and sometimes, even Spaniards, in spite of each group’s distinctive histories.

has taken on many forms. Lawrence A. Herzog suggests that the importance of culture is magnified in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands. And on the U.S.–Mexico border, Chicano/as often claim two, and sometimes more, nation-states. More importantly, Chicano/as often create unique spatial formations that have evolved under the different cultural codes and conditions of Mexico and the United States (Herzog 1990, 7).¹⁵ Another way to consider an alternative-citizenship in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, then, is to look to Chicano/a studies, which can help enable us to identify the numerous possibilities of an alternative-citizenship. Chicano/a studies have a long and wide-ranging history, however, it can be noted for its insistence on both cultural and political empowerment.

Today Chicano/as find themselves at a critical crossroad. Although they have accomplished much, many more struggles remain.¹⁶ One way we that can achieve this, as John A. Garcia points out, is through the penetration of Chicano/as into decision-making institutions (Garcia 1996). Maria Rosa Garcia-Acevedo continues:

Looking toward a new millennium, the Chicano community is faced with a challenge that goes beyond the U.S. border: the sustaining of links with its homeland, Mexico. This problematic relationship, which began in the mid-nineteenth century . . . has had a fascinating but

¹⁵ To be sure, there are also Anglo, indigenous, and other borderlanders. My focus here, however, is on a varied and diverse group of people I identify broadly as Mexican-American. Like the many indigenous groups in the borderlands, Mexican-Americans have experienced, confronted, and build barriers on the border (see Gutiérrez 1995). At the same time they have often dealt with the citizenship regime, as citizens, as non-citizens, *and* as second-class citizens.

¹⁶ The most notable achievements are not by way of management or ownership, but as the bulk of the work force, especially in the borderlands (see de la Torre and Rochin 1990). Indeed, we must address substantial problems of poverty and exploitation.

complex evolution. Prior to the advent of the Chicano Movement, few formal ties existed between Mexico and the Chicano community. Chicanos had been too preoccupied with national questions such as civil rights, education, and fair employment practices to turn their attention to foreign policy concerns. Some were also discouraged by the existence of discriminatory Mexican attitudes toward Chicanos. Moreover, for many Chicanos, Mexico was an unknown, uninterested, and distant homeland. (1996, 130)

At issue is that Chicano/a identities in the United States are constructed and developed through various discourses, and that these constructions are often informed and driven by racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-indigenous sentiments. The relationship between Chicano/as and citizenship thus raises important questions with regard to notions of equality, justice, power, and race/ism. In addition, while immigrant status is often an issue of importance for Chicano/as in the workplace, being undocumented is not a significant issue in the workplace because discriminatory conditions often exist for Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, indigenous peoples, other ethnic minorities and for women despite legal status. As the classic principles of U.S. democratic theory purport, full incorporation into U.S. society requires that all discriminatory barriers be eliminated. When applying these principles to the struggle for Mexican-American equality under the law, it is clear that many Chicano/as have arguably not been granted 'full' citizenship in the United States regardless of their legal status (Valencia, et al. 2004, 15-16).

Aztlán: The Emergent Indigenous Identity

To understand an alternative citizenship, it is important to understand one's experiences as everyday sites of negotiation with borders. While barriers are a strong feature of most border peoples' experiences, negotiation with borders are potential points for border crossings—

overcoming or at least coping with barriers from day to day. Much of the citizenship and borderlands literature highlights barriers and conflict, and it has been argued that there is an inherent conflict among and between all types of citizens (see, for example, Vila 2000). What is important to note here, as Rosaldo writes, is that “full citizenship and cultural visibility appear to be inversely related. When one increases the other decreases. Full citizens lack culture, and those most culturally endowed lack full citizenship” (1989, 198).

Furthermore, as C. Alejandra Elenes points out, the problem with mainstream discourses is not that they fail to take into account differences of race, class, gender, and sexuality, but that they fail to adequately theorise and even fail to acknowledge such categories as “white,” “male,” “heterosexual,” and “middle class,” and their interconnectedness (2002, 254). The American mainstream has also forged an unnecessary phenomenon in race and ethnic relations in the borderlands.¹⁷ Thus, citizenship is indeed a racialised concept. U.S. history is marked by structures that have determined a continuation of antagonism against ‘others.’ For example, as Carl Gutierrez-Jones explains, “The process by which Chicanos have become institutionally and popularly associated with criminality has had a long and complex history that is intimately related to their very construction as a social group in the United States” (Gutierrez-Jones 1995, 1). The Chicano/a experience also stems from the dynamics of geographical and

¹⁷ Negative racial/ethnic representations of Mexican-Americans in the United States stretch back before the U.S.-Mexico War. Mexicans have long been seen as a mongrel race in contrast to their northern neighbors, not only in skin color but also in morality. After the war, Mexicans living in the United States became Mexican-Americans, inheritors of a Mexican cultural identity but members of a stratified U.S. society (see Pettit 1980, 12).

socioeconomic backdrops.¹⁸ The strength of Mexican American culture, however, was that it could draw from its motherland. Still, assimilation has had major implications for some Chicano/as. Many experiences left them between a culture they left behind and a society that was unaccepting of them.¹⁹ On the other hand, other Chicano/as took to separatism either to migrate to Mexico, or in extreme cases, to re-conquer the U.S. Southwest (Vigil 1980, 162-166).

Because manipulation and destruction of oppressed peoples are inherent to colonialism, Franz Fanon postulates that the process of decolonization involves the creation of a national consciousness (1979, 210).²⁰ Following this argument, Sarah Ramirez contends that

¹⁸ Since the consolidation of the northernmost area of Mexico into the United States, American culture itself has gone through major changes. James Diego Vigil writes, "Industrialization and urbanization transformed a primarily agrarian society into an international military and political power . . . Social and economic sanctions were therefore developed to impede the entrance of ethnically and culturally 'different' people into the mainstream of American society" (Vigil 1980, 156). This put pressures on "others" to assimilate and accept U.S. bourgeois-values.

¹⁹ Along with this, many Mexican citizens often do not take Chicano culture seriously. The impression of border culture in the interior of Mexico is that of unconventional caricatures. The borderlands for them are the area where American influence and the appropriation of American culture by Mexicans are at its greatest levels. They also accuse Chicanos of being fully aware of bourgeois (read U.S.) values and defending these values as their own. Thus, Chicanos, for many Mexicans, have lost their identity (see Monsivais 1978, 64-67). Finally, rather than looking at their Mexican origin as a criterion of patriotism, Mexican-Americans often view it as the reason for their oppression.

²⁰ Franz Fanon suggests that nationalist consciousness is an attempt for the colonized to resist colonization and hence reclaim self-determination. Here a recuperation of the past is necessary. As colonial (post-U.S.-Mexico War) and neo-colonial (subject to economic and legal exploitative mechanisms) subjects in the United States, many Chicano/as often utilized an indigenous recuperation

what we see in Chicano/a nation-building is a bias of shared cultural indigenous heritage, a common language—a mixture of Spanish and English with some use of the various indigenous languages of Mexico, connection to/ownership of the land, and a political, social, and historical displacement (2002, 224). The Chicano/a homeland—an indigenous homeland—Aztlán, then becomes a unifying concept and base for Chicano/a nationalist discourse and of cultural pride, identity, and presence in the United States. Ramirez suggests that saying the word “Aztlán” also became a basis of commitment toward acknowledging and claiming indigenous imaginations as part of the Chicano/a reality (2002, 224-225).

However, the point that Ramirez makes is that this ‘imagined’ Chicano nation “served to subjugate, define, and control Chicanas, revealing a contradiction between ideology and praxis” (2002, 225). While nation-imagining implies uniformity, many have been uncritical of the official discourses of the Chicano Movement—except for the Chicana feminists.²¹ Ramirez writes:

Asserting a living Chicana theory: a theoretical discourse that considers the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion, among other factors, Chicana feminism integrates these complex intersections of the Chicana social quandary, creating alternative spaces to the controlling images and spaces of ethnocentric, ethnonostalgic, and patriarchal nationalist discourses. While also drawing from indigenous cultures and philosophies,

(see, for example, Vazquez and Torres 2003, 334). Adding to this, Benedict Anderson suggests that nation building is an extension of imagined “natural ties” (1993, 143).

²¹ In the course of cultural politics and the like, I have always believed that Chicana Feminism was ahead of its time; critiquing patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, and the general disregard for difference within some of the various stages of the Chicano Movement.

Chicana aesthetic productions employ its revisionist critique and create empowering images of personal and communal self-identity. (Ramirez 2002, 226)

A Note on Chicana Feminist Poetry

Nevertheless perspectives on Chicana thought are numerous. Even today, many forms of political action exist, ranging from formal or institutional politics, such as electoral politics, to various forms of rebellion, mobilisation and organisation, protest, and struggle (Vélez-Ibáñez 1996, 92–93). There are also other forms of political struggles that often revolve around cultural place, space, and processes that are not often understood. They are often filled with contradictions and internal opposition, and sometimes are never actually realised as a social movement.²² As Beezley and Curcio-Nagy write, “Marginal peoples—the poor, the enslaved, women—historically have manipulated cultural forms to their own benefit” (2000, xii). Even while the political importance and political impact of (popular) cultural studies have been subject to scrutiny, it has endured as an edifying, social, and political practice.²³

²² Within cultural and ethnic studies, African Americans and the blues seems to be the most common example of cultural resistance in the United States (see, for example, Palmer 1982).

²³ In their introduction, William H. Beezley and Linda A Curcio-Nagy identify five elements that are prevalent in the study of popular culture in Latin America. These are, “1) the invention of traditions, 2) the creation of national identity, which some call the imagined community, 3) the formation of gender roles, 4) the prevalence of ethnicity—a sharper designation than the category of race—and 5) the dynamic interplay between textual deconstruction and performance analysis that is neither one nor the other but the relationship of the two” (Beezley and Curcio-Nagy 2000, xix). Popular culture, they write, refers “to the set of images, practices, and interactions that distinguishes a community” (Beezley and Curcio-Nagy 2000, xi). In this case, popular culture and its more politically overt

Focusing on everyday struggles, the use of the poems offer a small sampling of the multiplicity of personal accounts and narratives through which borders are confronted and crossed. What makes poetry so interesting is that it is open to interpretation. Writing, explains Felipe de Ortego y Gasca “is a cultural act surrounded and impacted by historical forces. What is written depends on the motivations of the writer. As readers and critics, we cannot accurately discern those motivations, we can only approximate them” (2007, 345). Similarly, Francisco H. Vásquez and Rodolfo D. Torres (2003) note that the theme of language pervades all perspectives. Vásquez and Torres write, “this means that language, as it intersects power and becomes a discourse, functions much like a mountain, river, or forest. It determines to a large extent what can and cannot be said, where we can and cannot go” (2003, 75). While we may never truly know the role Chicano/a popular culture plays in challenging the citizenship regime, poetry and other cultural forms can freely explore the possibilities of an alternative-citizenship.

For example, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), a collection of essays, poems, short stories, literary and autobiographical works, brought to light an on-going conflict that women of color were having with racialised civil rights

synonym *national identity* signify everyday culture. As Beezley and Curcio-Nagy write, “[Popular culture] identifies a set of behavioral practices with pervasive, ordinary character and acknowledges the general acceptance of these practices, their roots in common knowledge, and their frequent expression in nonwritten form” (2000, xi). In a similar approach, Bueno and Caesar ask, “What exactly *is* a national culture at the level of the popular? Is it separable from the state? Can it be ultimately coherent or not? Is it the stuff of dreams or of nightmare?” (Bueno and Caesar 1998, 11–12). They conclude that the “study of popular culture recovers the reality of a country . . .” While popular culture often provokes some dispute about the construction of the nation, it continues to have the ability to construct a national identity.

movements for ignoring women, gender, and sexualities, and conflict with women's and feminist movements for ignoring race, ethnicity, and other identities. The editors Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, as well as their many contributors, were brought into the literary, cultural, and political spotlight, as their book provided "a catalyst, not a definitive statement on 'Third World Feminism in the U.S.'" (1981, xxvi). Along these lines, the poems echo thoughts about migration, borders, cultural identity, indigeneity, and citizenship—all from Mexican American women poets who have variously been called Chicana feminists and who generally utilize a Chicana feminist perspective. The term "Chicana feminist perspective", writes Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, "implies certain similarities with and differences from either an exclusively 'feminist' or 'Chicano' perspective" (2007, 364). Yarbro-Bejarano continues:

While sharing with the feminist perspective an analysis of questions of gender and sexuality, there are important differences between a Chicana perspective and the mainstream feminist one with regard to issues of race, culture and class. The Chicano perspective, while incorporating these important facets of race, culture and class, has traditionally neglected issues of gender and sexuality... While this may seem painfully obvious, the assertion of this project in Chicana writing is crucial in combating the tendency in both white feminist and Chicano discourse to see these elements as mutually exclusive. By asserting herself as Chicana or mestiza, the Chicana confronts the damaging fragmentation of her identity into component parts at war with each other. (2007, 364)

The search for a place and space is an on-going theme in Chicana literature.²⁴ This search is of particular importance for Mexican origin

²⁴ Likewise, mural art continues to fill in place and space for people in the borderlands. Mexican-American mural art recreates symbols and myths from south of the border to declare a sense of history, as well as utilises imagery from

writers (see also, for example, Anzaldúa 1987, 1990; Gomez- Peña 1996; R. Rodriguez 1996; L. Rodriguez 2003).²⁵ Literature of and from the borderlands is also notable for its insistence on voice, whereby voice becomes the means by which new spaces and places are created or redefined. It is here where multiple emerging identities and multidimensional paradoxes are experienced. Indeed, these literatures defy categorisation. Each writer creates a mixture of reality and fantasy. Moreover, each writer assists in creating images of the borderlands that is continuously emerging. Beyond the geographic and political border that separates the United States and Mexico, Mexican-American writers have exposed many other 'borders' in their search to survive within the larger realm of U.S. society, and to create and exhibit their sense of belonging.

In Lorna Dee Cervantes's (1981) Poem for The Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person, Could Believe In the War Between Races, the author speaks to her experience of race and of racism in the United States. While a personal narrative, the poem also addresses the differences between the dominant society

north of the border such as farm workers, U.S. activist heroes, and "social bandits" to declare as sense of community. Mural art, thus, often goes beyond the confined boundaries of legitimizing authorities and set issues. Throughout the U.S. Southwest, thousands of walls have been covered with community-created symbols and themes, which are often representative of a whole population, rather than being an individualized artistic expression (Vélez-Ibáñez 1996, 244-245). At the same time, mural art continues to be a vibrant expression of political consciousness. Politically, murals document cultural persistence and continuance; by expressing liberation, self-determination, and multiculturalism murals provide a multi-vocal means to literally and figuratively fill in places and spaces (Vélez-Ibáñez 1996, 263-264).

²⁵ For a great discussion of narrative and semi-narrative works by borderlands writers see Vélez-Ibáñez's (1996) chapter entitled "The Search for Meaning and Space through Literature," pp. 212-243.

(whites) who can ignore race and racism and others (people of color) who are reminded of their differences on a daily basis. Cervantes writes:

I believe in revolution
because everywhere the crosses are burning,
sharp-shooting goose-steppers round every corner,
there are snipers in the schools. . . .
(I know you don't believe this.
You think this is nothing
but faddish exaggeration. But they
are not shooting at you).
(Cervantes 1981, 229)

Consequently, as the previous lines illustrate, Cervantes describes the ongoing situation of being a U.S. citizen, yet not fully belonging to the nation. She concludes:

Outside my door
there is a real enemy
who hates me.
[. . .]
Every day I am deluged with reminders
that this is not
my land
and this is my land.
I do not believe in the war between races
but in this country
there is war.
(Cervantes 1981, 230)

This and other poems are timely reminders of the contradictions embodied and experienced by Chicana women who live within various intersecting and overlapping borderlands (geographical, sexual, gendered, racial, class, and so on). More importantly, poems

draw attention to the borderlands experiences of the writers as not being fully recognised or constituted as full citizens. By engaging the political and cultural aspects of their identities, the writers offer both fictionalised and autobiographical testimonies to address the lack of citizenship they experience in mainstream feminisms and Chicano nationalist discourses. Still, the poems are not wholly limited to the experiences of the writers in particular, or of Chicanas specifically. And while quite approachable, the poems provide a deep, complex, and encompassing counter-narrative to the citizenship regime. As Delberto Dario Ruiz writes, “The border, immigration regulations, and restrictions on naturalization and citizenship contribute to the construction of racialized and gendered Xicanas/os....As such, the Xicana/o has been historically cast into an ‘alien-ated’ relation to the category of citizenship” (2002, 361).²⁶ Chicana feminist poetry allows us to rethink language as a given process of rules and to acknowledge that speaking and writing are culturally produced discourses. The language of Chicana feminist poetry can and often includes English, Spanish, indigenous languages, slang, the creation of new words, and the mixing of genres to articulate complex ideas. What the language does is reveal the colonising aspects of the ‘rules’ at play when we express a position on who we are, or what we can be today (see also, Dario Ruiz 2002).

Conclusion

The relationship between borders and emergent indigenous identities is an embattled zone. Traditional conceptions of the nation-state often emphasise territorial boundaries, but as migration patterns show, people are not always bound to one territory. This is not a new notion. Territorial boundaries have never fully conformed to the movement of

²⁶ The term Xicana/o, here, is the same as Chicana/o.

people (Newman 2000, 21-22). In this chapter, I proposed that borders can no longer confine citizens. Instead, alternative-citizenship forms may be emerging because of the people in borderlands. Indeed, citizenship is not the neutral concept that anti-immigrant advocates assume, primarily because they overlook the ways in which citizenship is constructed and more importantly overlook who gets to construct citizenship. Likewise, in linking power to citizenship, we see that identity formations including race, class, gender, and indigeneity all factor into the conception of citizenship, particularly in terms of who is granted full citizenship rights and who is not. An alternative citizenship of belonging is based on the claims made against a traditional citizenship of membership, which has often subordinated people based on their race, class, and gender. Traditional citizenship stands in the way of a fully open and democratic society because it is arbitrarily given to those with power, while many people of color, indigenous peoples, the poor, and women, remain second-class citizens, non-citizens, or both. Indeed, there is something significant about what it means to belong—politically, culturally, and socially—and what I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter is that for most people this is often articulated through the complexities of emergent identities.

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