THE NAFTA SPECTACLE: ENVISIONING BORDERS, MIGRANTS AND THE U.S.-MEXICO NEOLIBERAL RELATION IN VISUAL CULTURE

by

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This dissertation brings critical visual culture studies to bear on mediatized representations of borders and migration in U.S. and Mexican contexts. In particular, this study examines how the human price of the North American Free Trade Agreement is represented and/or disappeared in popular visual culture. I deploy an eclectic methodological framework whose elements emerge from the confluence of Border Studies, Visual Cultural Studies and theorizations of neoliberalism in order to study how television, print media and narrative and documentary film serve as sites for both the visual constitution and critical contestation of neoliberal agendas. For example, I view objects of visual culture such as the *Border Wars* television program, *Backpacker* magazine and films *Sin dejar huella* and *AbUSed: The Postville Raid* as powerful and privileged sites for the analysis of political discourses.
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation studies visual discourses of U.S. and Mexican borders and critically asks what kinds of representational work they do in the frame of and/or name of neoliberalism in these times and spaces of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In particular, this study investigates how visual techniques and strategies are deployed and how they teach spectators, i.e. the viewing public(s), to see and think about borders, migration and citizenship.

This dissertation responds to a need to investigate the human and representational side of borders, migrations and citizenships. Despite the predominant housing of Border Studies in the social sciences, as Benjamin Muller so poignantly commented during a conversation with students at the University of Arizona, “data is never any use in debates about migration”¹. Following the rhetorical question posited by Benjamin Muller—“how do you challenge a [visual] representation with data?”—this dissertation works from the premise that visual representations are powerful discursive devices that do real work and have constitutive effects. Therefore, this dissertation studies and “takes seriously the performative and disruptive potentialities of popular culture and imagination” (Muller, “Securing” 201) and asks how is neoliberal discourse embodied, performed and therefore constituted and/or critiqued in border spectacles.

This research utilizes an eclectic methodological framework whose elements emerge from the confluence of Border Studies, Visual Cultural Studies and theorizations

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¹ Benjamin Muller made this comment during a discussion in Javier Duran’s (UA Professor) graduate class in Border Studies at the University of Arizona, Oct 26, 2010.
of Neoliberalism in order to investigate visual discourses on borders, migrants, Nation-States and citizenships. Visual discourse produces knowledge and meaning through visual language. This understanding of visual discourse does not deny a more traditional Foucauldian\(^2\) definition that emphasizes written and spoken statements, but rather recognizes the importance of visual statements, visibility and invisibility, in combination with spoken and written statements in the production of knowledge, understandings and meanings. As Stuart Hall (Questions of Cultural Identity) writes, “[a] national culture is a discourse—a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves” (613 italics in original). This dissertation studies visual documents, i.e. narrative films, television programs, documentary films, magazines and televised and written news reports as participants in, and formants of, visual discourses, that like national culture described by Hall, organize and inform actions and understandings of U.S. and Mexican borders, migrants, citizens and sovereignties in the times of NAFTA. This dissertation therefore asks how does thinking in terms of neoliberalism inform and enable readings of these visual documents.

A central tenet of this dissertation is the possibility and necessity of reading and viewing “mainstream” visual discourses as privileged sites for the analysis of political discourses and popular understandings of borders, nations, citizens and migrants. Following Lauren Berlant’s readings of the “waste materials” and “silly things” of everyday life in The Queen of America goes to Washington City, I also “…read these mainstream documents and discourses of the nation not as white noise but as powerful

\(^2\) See Foucault’s Archaeology of Knowledge.
language, not as ‘mere’ fiction or fantasy but as violence and desire that have material effects” (13). In particular this dissertation reads across free trade agreements, immigration policies and their visible and invisible realizations, performances and imaginations in popular visual culture.

As the Mexican and the United States Nation-States and their borders, including Mexico’s southern borders, are centered in this study, I investigate how both the U.S. and Mexican States and their citizens and non-citizens are imagined and configured in these diverse visual media. Looking at visual documents from Mexican and U.S. perspectives, this dissertation will study how Nations, citizenships, sovereignties and borders are all contested terrains constantly under re-construction in the times of NAFTA.

The Neoliberal Dispositif:

In an attempt to define neoliberalism, neoliberal agendas and the myriad realizations and rationales of neoliberalism, I find that the organizing concept of a neoliberal dispositif more closely reflects how neoliberalism intersects with, entraps and drives new relationships between and constructions of States, economies, workers, citizens, non-citizens migrants, borders and sovereignties. Foucault, in a 1977 interview, describes the dispositif; (translated as apparatus), in the following manner:

What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the
apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.

Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. *Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality.* In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely.

Thirdly, I understand by the term “apparatus” a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need.* The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. (“The Confession of the Flesh” (1977) my emphasis).

Thinking about neoliberalism in terms of a *dispositif* enables a reading, and the inclusion, of the salient theories, definitions and realizations of neoliberalism. For the purposes of this study, and to borrow generously from Foucault, I define the neoliberal *dispositif* as a “thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic proposition” that promote and realize
the basic tenets of neoliberalism – that is the extension of market values and ethos of privatization and personal responsibility to all social institutions. The Neoliberal dispositif recognizes that neoliberalism is simultaneously program and practice.

Simon Springer puts forth a similar project in “Neoliberalism as discourse: between Foucauldian political economy and Marxian poststructuralism” in which he proposes a conceptualization of neoliberalism “as a mutable, inconsistent, and variegated process that circulates through the discourses it constructs, justifies, and defends” (135).

In a review of myriad theorizations of neoliberalism, Springer groups general tendencies for concepts and argues that a “discourse approach” attempts to free up the entrapments of neoliberalism viewed as either a top-down ideological hegemony via Marxian conceptualizations or as a ‘bottom-up’ poststructuralist mode of governmentality (135), recognizing both while not privileging one over the other.

In so doing, Springer seeks to encompass what could be seen as the four general characterizations of neoliberalism, namely “ideological hegemonic project, policy and program, state form and governmentality” (135). Springer works to draw from each of these four predominant categorizations that he also notes tend to be combined, or viewed as overlapping, by other theorists. In large part, Springer seeks to reconcile the hegemonic ideology of a Marxian political economy with “poststructuralist conceptualizations of governmentality” (137) by highlighting and viewing hegemony “in the Gramscian sense as neither unitary or monolithic” (138). As Springer explains, and I

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cite at length:

Indeed, such variegated hegemonies play themselves out as neoliberalizations in myriad situated contexts (Brenner et al., 2010). Such recognition of the hegemony of neoliberalism (or more appropriately the hegemonies of neoliberalizations) as in Marxian approaches is not at all inconsistent with poststructuralist inspired notions of governmentality. Rather, the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault, 1991a) is part of how neoliberal hegemonic constellations have assembled themselves, particularly through networks of think tanks, whose embodied participants can be broadly conceived of as a transnational capitalist class (Carroll, 2010)” (Springer 138).

The theoretical challenge of how to best define neoliberalism is also expressed by Aihwa Ong when she writes:

> It therefore seems appropriate to study neoliberalism not as a ‘culture’ or ‘structure’ but as mobile calculative techniques of governing that can be decontextualized from their original sources and recontextualized in constellations of mutually constitutive and contingent relationships. This milieu is a space of betwixt and between that is the site of the problem and of its resolution (13).

Definitions and descriptions of neoliberalism predominantly start from an understanding of neoliberalism as an economic doctrine that extends into and beyond
economic policies. Wendy Brown argues in “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy”:

[...] neo-liberalism is not simply a set of economic policies; it is not only about facilitating free trade, maximizing corporate profits, and challenging welfarism. Rather, neo-liberalism carries a social analysis which, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire. Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; rather it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player. (3 emphasis in original)

David Harvey also highlights the theoretical rational of neoliberalism when he writes in A Brief History of Neoliberalism: “Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). Harvey describes neoliberalism as a hegemonic mode of discourse that has become a common-sense way of interpreting and understanding the world (Brief History 3). Here Harvey, like Brown, notes that neoliberalism entails, among many other things, a particular mode of being and thinking. In Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty, Ong argues that neoliberalism can also be understood as a “new mode of political optimization” (3) and a “technology of government” (3) that
reorganizes the relationships between sovereignties, territorialities, governments and
citizenships in economic terms:

[n]eoliberalism is often discussed as an economic doctrine with a negative
relation to state power, a market ideology that seeks to limit the scope and
activity of governing. But neoliberalism can also be conceptualized as a
new relationship between government and knowledge through which
governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems
that need technical solutions (3).

Therefore, to fully understand neoliberalism, it is important to not only study the
economic policies, state projects and free-market principles that drive them, but also the
adjustment of the relationships between the actors and elements that constitute
neoliberalism. As Ong and Brown both argue, neoliberalism brings about new
governmentalities.

While economic policies such as NAFTA are exemplary of what neoliberalism is
and does, as Brown notes, focusing too closely on a referent such as NAFTA can lead to
a reduction of neoliberalism “to a bundle of economic policies with inadvertent political
and social consequences” thereby eschewing “the political rationality that both organizes
these policies and reaches beyond the market” (emphasis in original 2). Furthermore,
Brown argues that by focusing too closely on the economic policies, we are apt to miss
an understanding of what is new in neo-liberalism. For Brown, it is important to
understand “neo-liberalism” as something more than “a revival of classical liberal
political economy” (2). For Brown, narrow focus on the economic can lead us to miss
what she calls the “specifically political register of neo-liberalism in the First World, that is, its powerful erosion of liberal democratic institutions and practices in places like the United States” (2). While Brown’s study focuses on these “neglected dimensions” (2) in the context of the U.S., study of neoliberalism in Mexico reveals how state projects and the relationship between the Mexican state and its citizens are also being redefined under neoliberalism. As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo (2005) describes NAFTA in Mexico:

For NAFTA, I suggest, as the fulcrum of neoliberalism, has wrought the biggest change to the conception of Mexican national sovereignty since the Mexican revolution of 1910. Indeed, in some ways it is the tangible result of seventy long years of legal counterinsurgency waged by U.S. and Mexican elites against the socialist principles enshrined in the Mexican constitution of 1917 (759).

Similarly, Ong’s argument that “[n]ew forms of governing and being governed and new notions of what it means to be human are at the edge of emergence” (4) can certainly be extended to the North American context.

While NAFTA makes provisions for the free flow of goods and capital, it makes no provisions for labor. At the same time, the U.S. government’s lack of accommodations for NAFTA, namely the maintenance of farm subsidies combines with the Mexican government’s accommodations for NAFTA, i.e., the reduction and elimination of farm subsidies and communal land holdings⁴ has contributed to the destabilization of the farm economy in Mexico, encouraging emigration, U.S. border security attempts to remove or

⁴ The 1992 amendment to Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution formalized these changes.
deny entry to those who are drawn to it by virtue of the U.S.-Mexico economic relationship. This is not an oversight but rather the intentional inclusion, via exclusion, of migrant labor, in the North American neoliberal project, which produces and relies upon a detainable and deportable workforce. As Nestor García Canclini argues, we must pay attention to that which neoliberalism excludes in order to constitute itself. (*La globalización imaginada*). One realization of neoliberalism that informs this study is the Mexican State’s accommodations to NAFTA, and the U.S. State’s immigration enforcement as the armed branch of NAFTA, and what they imply in terms of redefining the relationship between the States and citizenry and new state formations of subjects.

Neoliberalism, as exemplified by the NAFTA, refers not only to a body of free-market economic reforms, but also to a reorganization of the state-market relationship. Ong argues that what neoliberalism is depends on your vantage point. For some, neoliberalism is a series of market reforms that allows for the free flow of capital, for many others, is implies radicalized capitalist imperialism tied to lawlessness and military action.

Brown’s study focuses on the political implications of neoliberalism, and particularly how neoliberal political rationality emerges as a form of governmentality. Brown defines governmentality as “a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one which produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior and a new organization of the social” (1).

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governmentality via Foucault, and emphasizes that neoliberal governmentality includes the “state formation of subjects”, as opposed to “state control of subjects” (21). Along these lines, Ong writes of neoliberal governmentality, with reference to Foucault’s “biopower” and “biopolitics”: “[n]eoliberalism is merely the most recent development of such techniques that govern human life, that is, a governmentality that relies on market knowledge and calculations for a politics of subjection and subject-making that continually places in question the political existence of modern human beings” (13).

Brown outlines the basic characteristics of this neoliberal political rationality that drives neoliberal governmentality as follows:

1. The political sphere and every dimension of human existence are submitted to market rationality (4). Or, in other words “economic rationality [is extended] to all aspects of thought and activity” (7).

2. The state is placed “in forthright and direct service to the economy” (7). On this point Brown elaborates: “neo-liberalism does not conceive either the market itself or rational economic behavior as purely natural. Both are constructed -- organized by law and political institutions, and requiring political intervention and orchestration. Far from flourishing when left alone, the economy must be directed, buttressed, and protected by law and policy as well as by the dissemination of social norms designed to facilitate competition, free trade, and rational

centered notions of political power (though it does not eschew the state as a site of governmentality), from the division between violence and law, and from a distinction between ideological and material power. Finally governmentality features state formation of subjects rather than state control of subjects; put slightly differently, it features control achieved through formation rather than repression or punishment” (21).
economic action on the part of every member and institution of society” (4). Therefore, under neoliberalism, the state actively intervenes in the market, and similarly the economy serves as a source of state legitimacy. (i.e. the green Wal-Mart signs in Mexico)

3. Economic rationality is extended to formerly non-economic domains and institutions. This extends to “individual conduct, or more precisely, prescribes the citizen-subject conduct in a neo-liberal order” (5-6).

4. The state and the subject are suffused with economic rationality, which radically transforms and narrows the criteria for good social policy. Per this rationale, social policy must meet profitability tests, incite and unblock competition, and produce rational self-caring subjects. Furthermore, social policy per neoliberal political rationality “obeys the entrepreneurial principle of ‘equal inequality for all’ as it ‘multiplies and expands entrepreneurial forms with in the body social’ (Lemke 195). This is the principle that links the neo-liberal governmentalization of the state with the development of a neo-liberal social sphere and neo-liberal subjects” (7).

With regard to the fourth point, Brown argues that neoliberal political rationality is normative rather than ontological, and incites the development of the necessary “rational” “homoeconomicus” subject actor. Also with regard to Brown’s third and fourth points, Lisa Duggan, in The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy, highlights the cultural underpinnings of neoliberalism. Duggan
signals how the ruse of neoliberalism is it’s casting as a neutral economic policy, based on what she calls a false rhetoric of separation between economy and culture. As Duggan demonstrates, race, class, gender hierarchies, and sex, religion and ethnic boundaries and institutions are precisely the channels of difference through which money, power and culture resources and social organization flow. “…in practice contemporary neoliberal policies have been implemented in and through culture and politics, reinforcing or contesting relations of class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion or nationality” (xiv).

Given these in depth studies and theorizations of neoliberalism, I view neoliberalism via NAFTA as a neo-imperialistic hegemonic discourse and project that relies on military and economic coercion to carry out economic and social reforms via channels of difference, such as gender and ethnicity, and that extends market values and an ethos of privatization and personal responsibility to all social institutions. I find that neoliberalism via NAFTA intersects with, entraps and drives new relationships between and constructions of States, economies, workers, citizens, non-citizens migrants, borders and sovereignties. And given all of the theories outlined above, I find the organizing concept of the neoliberal dispositif most thoroughly captures how neoliberalism is simultaneously program and practice.

My framework combines border studies and visual culture studies to examine how of objects of popular visual culture deploy visual techniques to direct spectators, to see and think about borders and migration. I study how visual culture makes visible and invisible, certain elements of the border crossing and detention and removal process and
does particular kinds of work in the frame of, or name of neoliberalism and national
security. What I broadly refer to here as border theories is an organizational tool for
grouping together a diverse body of work on deportation, migration, citizenship, border
security, border economy, border culture and nativist discourse, particularly in the U.S.-
Mexican context. Throughout the dissertation, I utilize critical theories on these topics
and I bring together studies in political economy and cultural studies. As Renato Rosaldo
(1998) writes: “[t]he art of interpreting the literal border today involves the simultaneous
analysis of the theater and its symbolic dimensions as well as the actual violence. One
should not reduce one to the other, not become so constructivist as not to notice that
people are being killed, not look so closely at the violence as not to notice its symbolic
dimensions” (635). Following Rosaldo, this dissertation examines numerous
interpretations of literal borders, and how violence, imagined and material, is deployed in
these border spectacles.

Structure of Dissertation

The first two chapters, “The Frontera as Frontier” and “The Spectacle of
Detention and Removal: Envisioning and Disappearing Migrants on the American
Frontier” examine what kinds of representational work mainstream media visual
narratives of border security and border spectacles do in the frame of (or name of)
neoliberalism and national security. In particular, the first chapter studies articles about
the U.S.-Mexico Border in National Geographic, Backpacker and other outdoor
exploration magazines. The second chapter examines the televised border security
spectacle in The National Geographic Channel’s TV program *Border Wars* and CBS’s *Homeland Security USA*.

In the first chapter, I examine how the explorer magazines rely upon and re-activate a “border as frontier” scenario. I employ Diana Taylor’s notion of scenario from performance studies in order to analyze these visual discourses (*Archive and Repertoire*). In this scenario the U.S.-Mexico border is imagined as a dangerous frontier space in need of protection by rugged, sanctioned, explorers. The threats are imagined as Mexican migrants, using stock characters from the frontier scenario: bandits, criminals, and vulgar women. While it was generally expected to find migrants vilified on *Border Wars*, it was unexpected to find similar discourses in outdoor exploration magazines like *Backpacker*.

Given the similarities between the objects of visual culture analyzed in the first two chapters, I examine how these visual spectacles and narratives further neoliberal agendas and configure migrants and borders? Both chapters utilize studies in U.S. nativism, frontier discourses, theories of deportation and deportability, as well as visual cultural studies and theories of neoliberalism in order to answer the proposed questions.

The second chapter, “The Spectacle of Detention and Removal”, takes its language directly from U.S. policy and explores the realization and representation of this policy in television and print media, viewing the spectacle of detention and removal as a mediatized manifestation of official immigration policies such as *Operation Endgame: Office of Detention and Removal Strategic Plan, 2003-2012: Detention and Removal Strategy for a Secure Homeland*. *Operation Endgame* is a “multi-year strategic
enforcement plan” whose goal is to “build the capacity to ‘remove all removable aliens’”
(ii).

I study how these visual spectacles make some elements of the detention and
removal process hyper-visible while simultaneously disappearing others. In particular, I
investigate how this visibility and invisibility does particular kinds of constitutive work in
the frame of (or name of) neoliberalism and national security. By framing individuals in
scenarios of migrancy and nativism, the spectacles of detention and removal provided in
Border Wars invite viewers to blind themselves from the larger injustices that construct
the migrant body and are committed against the migrant during the detention and removal
process. Furthermore, the Border Wars T.V. show and website promote an active
spectatorship by encouraging the viewer to not only adopt the gaze of the military
guardian of the nation, but actively perform military citizenship through the border agent
simulation online game, Border Wars: A day on the Line.

In this chapter, I also analyze the ways in which the Border Wars’ spectacles of
detention and removal make the criminalization of the migrant hyper-visible while
simultaneously making the more complex and inhumane elements of the detention and
removal process seemingly invisible and therefore resistant to critique.

As many of the Border War’s episodes that I study were filmed in Southern
Arizona and the Backpacker and National Geographic articles also feature the Arizona-
Sonora border, I contrast the portrayals of the border, migrants and issues in these mass-
marketed forms with smaller and local media representations. For example, I am
particularly interested in the marked differences of the representation of the “border war’
as it relates to the Tohono O’odham Reservation and Nation that is crossed by the U.S. – Mexico border.

Some of the notions that are critically theorized and studied are criminality, violence and militarization as products and tools of the State apparatus. Studies such as Timothy Dunn’s *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992: Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home* and Peter Andreas’ *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide* serve as critical starting points for these analyses. In order to explore how constructions of States and citizens simultaneously produce and rely on identifications and imaginations of criminals, migrants and dangerous Others, I draw on the works that address the construction of “dangerous Others” such as Sarah Hill’s “Purity and Danger on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1991-1994” and Nicholas De Genova’s *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago*.

Throughout the dissertation I explore how theories of visual culture are useful for discussing the representation of borders and migrants within the frame of neoliberalism. For example, I examine notions of spectatorship as well as those of visibility and invisibility, through the works of Taylor and make particular use of her theory of percepticide: “the act of making the visible invisible through the “self-blinding” of the general population” (*Disappearing Acts* 123). I will also explain how the study of visual media permits a particular understanding of popular imaginations and the material effects of neoliberalism on borders, Nations and migrants.

By asking and theorizing how images do work, I am also asking how are these media not only representing violence, but also actively producing violence? Therefore, I
study how visual media constitute spectacles. I begin by investigating how spectacles are defined and theorized by Guy Debord and then analyze how the notion of spectacle is a critical tool for studying visual representations of borders, migrants and citizens within the frame of neoliberalism. The “spectacle” is also a useful analytical tool because it signals the important inter-workings of vision, visibility, invisibility, the gaze, power, representation and spectatorship, as well as the social relation between images and their viewers. As Diana Taylor states, “[t]he society of the spectacle, to borrow Debord’s term, ties individuals into an economy of looks and looking” (119). Furthermore it also points to the slippage that exists between the material and the symbolic in visual media.

This study also encompass the work of theorists like Nicholas De Genova, who theorizes “border spectacles”, writing “[t]he elusiveness of the law, and its relative invisibility in producing ‘illegality,’ requires this spectacle of enforcement at the border, which renders a radicalized Mexican/migrant ‘illegality’ visible, and lends it the commonsensical air of a natural fact” (Working the Boundaries 242). As I mention above, this dissertation looks at the visual construction of criminals as part of the larger NAFTA spectacle. The visual cultural methodology brought to bear on spectacle provides theoretical tools for studying the how these identities and subjectivities are visually constructed and deployed.

The third chapter, “Screening NAFTA: Borders, Migration, Flexible Citizenship and Neoliberalism in Mexican Film” utilizes film theory and extends the neoliberal theoretical lens to study how NAFTA is visually represented in its Mexican context. In particular, this chapter studies critical views of neoliberalism in Mexico and in so doing
shifts the analytical focus of the larger study. Wherein the objects of visual culture addressed in the first two chapters advocate for greater militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and disappear many of the broader structural elements that inform and influence migration across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the films studied in this chapter explore national belonging and subaltern survival in Mexico relative to the neoliberal arrangement and in so doing address the structural underpinnings of neoliberalism in Mexico, as it relates to the U.S. and NAFTA. Specifically, this chapter analyzes Sin dejar huella by María Novaro and Sleep Dealer by Alex Rivera, examining how each film visualizes the unfolding of neoliberalism in Mexico, its roots, it possible futures, as well as possible alternatives.

Both films are staged and filmed predominantly in Mexico with significant sections along Mexico’s northern and southern borders. As each film dedicates a significant part of the film to neoliberalism and migration as they relate to Southern Mexico, I pay particular attention to how Mexico’s southern borders are represented in these films. The chapter also situates the films within ongoing discussions about post-NAFTA cinema in Mexico.

This chapter also draws from urban theory (David Harvey) as well as film theory (Ana López and Laura Mulvey, among others) to explore how the human side of the neoliberal dispositif is imagined and problematized in film. If the North American neoliberal dispositif has driven people to migrate, then how are these migrations treated, imagined and registered in visual discourses? Through these films, we can observe how two filmmakers envision migratory experiences relative to unbridled capitalism and
neoliberal imperialism and create oppositional and critical imaginaries of experiences within neoliberal frameworks.

In relation to both the examples of critical imaginaries that filmmakers Rivera and Novaro present, and the larger project of the dissertation, my closing chapter, “Documenting Abuse: Critical Witnessing in Documentary Film—Migration, Detention and Removal” examines how documentaries attempt to capture migrant experiences and can serve as sites of critical witnessing of migratory experiences in Mexico and the United States. Given that the visual spectacle of border security, detention and removal, such as that produced in Border Wars, visualizes the condition of migrant illegality while simultaneously inviting the spectator to view the embodied performance of neoliberalism and nativism by the security agents, who maintain and reproduce it through force, I find that these imaginations simultaneously encourage percepticide of the violence of migration, making the physical and systemic violence suffered by migrants seemingly invisible therefore and resistant to critique, ultimately inviting the spectator to “collude with the violence around them” (Disappearing Acts 123). Therefore, in this concluding chapter, I deploy Taylor’s concept of critical witnessing, in which spectators observe, remember and report on the violence that they have seen, particularly that which has been obscured and/or the public has otherwise been invited to avoid seeing critically. Similarly, through the study of three documentary texts, I examine where and how visual narratives can produce or encourage moments of counter-visuality and the production of oppositional gazes. I employ Nicholas Mirzoeff’s concept of “reclaiming the look” as
well as Slavoj Zizek’s tripartite of violence to examine how these documentaries do or do not attempt to look for and visualize what Zizek describes as systemic violence.

This chapter analyzes documentary films centered on human rights abuses suffered by migrants, during the migratory process and/or in detention and removal procedures. The films studied are *De nadie* by Tin Dirdamal, *AbUSed: The Postville Raid* by Luis Argueta and “Lost in Detention” from PBS’s *Frontline* Series.

Dirdamal’s *De nadie* centers on the abject and violent conditions faced by Central Americans when migrating north through Mexico; *AbUSed: the Postville Raid* explores the effects and the structural roots of the May 12, 2008 raid, at Agriprocessors Inc. in Postville, Iowa; And “Lost in Detention” examines the current U.S. immigration enforcement system and stories of hidden abuse in detention centers and the results of the U.S. enforcement program “Secure Communities”. As all three are critical of the dangers and abuses that migrants suffer, I examine how these films visualize contestatory discourses and serve as loci of denunciations.

I find that *De nadie*, *AbUSed: The Postville Raid* and “Lost in Detention” all visualize that which Ong describes as the “neoliberal exception,” that “pries open the seam between sovereignty and citizenship, generating successive degrees of insecurity for low-skilled citizens and migrants who will have to look beyond the state for the safeguarding of their rights” (19).

In sum, this dissertation studies the ever-emerging neoliberal dispositif and analyzes how visual discourses serve as sites of analysis for the embodiment and performance of neoliberal agendas, taking seriously and viewing critically the
constitutive and disruptive relationships between visual culture and the neoliberal

dispositif in the times and territories of NAFTA.
CHAPTER ONE: THE FRONTERA AS FRONTIER

In this chapter I examine how the explorer magazines *Backpacker*, *National Geographic* and *National Geographic Adventure* rely upon and re-activate a “border as frontier” scenario. In this scenario the U.S.-Mexico border is imagined as a dangerous frontier space in need of protection by rugged, sanctioned, explorers. The threats are imagined as Mexican migrants, using stock characters from the frontier scenario: bandits, criminals, and vulgar women. While it may come as little surprise to find migrants vilified on a border security television program such as *Border Wars*, it was unexpected to find similar discourses in outdoor exploration magazines like *Backpacker*.

I came to the magazine articles while perusing a variety of websites published by vigilante groups that work along the U.S.-Mexico border. On one of the websites, I came across a story about Kris Eggle, a park ranger who was killed in 2002 while on duty in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Southern Arizona. From there, I followed a link to a page dedicated to the fallen park ranger (www.kriseggle.org), which includes links to another number newspaper and magazine articles, and provides a list of recommended reading. The list includes multiple magazine articles that focus on the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (OPCNM) and Eggle’s death, including Annette McGivney’s *Backpacker* article, “The Wildest Park in America” and Tom Clynes *National Geographic Adventure* article “National Park War Zone”. In my search to locate the Clynes’ article, I came across Charles Bowden’s online article in *National Geographic*.

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Geographic, titled “Our Wall”, which also has a print version, as well as Tim Cahill’s “Border Patrol: Along the Devil’s Highway”, also in National Geographic Adventure. For this chapter, I predominantly focus my study on National Geographic’s “Our Wall” and Backpacker’s “Wildest Park in America” articles, but I will also include examples from the other magazines wherein they present information that is strikingly divergent from that of the other two articles, and/or when their repetition of the form also deserves attention.

If the Kris Eggle website is intended to honor the memory of Eggle, and apparently inform readers about the issues facing the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument because of its geopolitical location, it begs the question, what do these documents have to say about the U.S.-Mexico border, the “issues” and possible solutions. My readings of these magazine articles eventually led me to open my study towards a broader investigation of visual treatments of the U.S.-Mexico border, in particular border security as is vividly performed in Homeland Security USA and Border Wars, examined in the following chapter.

The Backpacker article is part of the magazine’s “Wild” edition, which includes the editors’ “Wild list” of choices for things like, “Best Bouldering” and “Ultimate Raingear Testing”. Apparently Eggle’s death in The OPCNM rendered it Backpacker’s choice for “Wildest Park” in 2003. The cover advertises the article with the header “Most Dangerous Park in America: We Dare You To Hike It”! The article also includes a section titled, “Safe Havens: 3 Alien-Free Border Hikes”. With this article alone it was apparent that I had stumbled upon, in a seemingly unexpected place, pieces of public
discussion about the U.S.-Mexico border, migration, sovereignty and violence. However, as Lauren Berlant so poignantly reminds us, when referring to her archive of “silly materials” from popular culture:

[O]ne does not find the materials of the patriotic public sphere theorizing citizenship in either beautiful or coherent ways. These materials frequently use the silliest, most banal and erratic logic imaginable to describe important things, like what constitutes intimate relations, political personhood, and national life. […] I read these mainstream documents and discourses of the nation not as white noise but as powerful language, not as ‘mere’ fiction or fantasy but as violence and desire that have material effects. (12-13)

As Berlant further argues, we find “moments of oppressive optimism in normal national culture” (13). Therefore, in this study, I ask, what are the desires that seem to be driving how these objects of contemporary visual culture express and constitute violence? How and why is it that outdoor exploration magazines become the sites that participate in ongoing public conversations and understandings of the U.S.-Mexico border and the migrants that cross it. When some of the most problematic and disturbing anti-immigrant violence is performed in a backpacking magazine, it reminds us that visual culture has material effects in constellations, flashing up and disappearing but all the while forming part of the public imaginary.

While discussions of the U.S.-Mexico border seem to always already have something to do with those who cross it irregularly, focusing much less on those who live
in and frequently move throughout the borderlands, critical readings of these visual cultural texts can help reveal how these associations come about, what kinds of constitutive representational work they do, as well as the kinds of erasures they perform. In general, I find the articles and television programs all participate in and constitute part of a public discourse about the U.S.–Mexico border, which has become a requisite element and assumed stage for the U.S. border security spectacle.

Along with Berlant’s notion of the ‘moments of oppressive optimism that we can find the in the waste materials of the patriotic public sphere’, this chapter builds upon, and works to contribute to, the work of Leo Chávez’s much referenced Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation, in which he studies the covers of popular news magazines, such as Newsweek, Time, U.S. News and World Report, The Nation and American Heritage. Chávez argues that these print media play an important role in the formation and reflection of the national discourse: “[m]agazines are in the business of attracting consumers, but in a larger sense, they are also part of the national agenda of constructing subjects as citizens. That objective, however, is undermined by the representation of immigrants and their offspring as different, as Other, and as danger” (302). Following Chávez, as well as the work of Berlant, I study these particular representations of the U.S.-Mexico border and border security, and ask how do these visual discourses participate in a national discourse that constructs, represents, and worries about, citizens, non-citizens, borders, security, sovereignty and the state.

7 As Sarah Hill writes, “In fact, in the 1970s and 1980s, a ‘border’ story was almost always an immigration story” (784). See also Leo Chávez and De Genova “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life” (436-439).
The magazine articles studied here focus on border security and the environment of the border, but do not feature direct representations of migrant detentions. However as we will see in the next chapter, the television programs center on the theme of militarized national security, they focus more on the performed practices of border security and migrant detentions and removals. However, I find that all of these sites of mass popular culture produce a particular kind of border discourse, or rather reproduce and rely on a frontier scenario in which the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is constructed as a wild frontier space, with its requisite lawlessness, danger, erasures, divine providence and valiant protectors.

In her study of U.S. filmic treatments of the U.S.-Mexico border, *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier*, Camilla Fojas finds that the trope of the Western Frontier and its stock characters form part of a national narrative on sovereignty and immigration. Particularly in post-World War Two western films, Fojas finds that the western frontier is used to symbolize “the limitation of movement” and the limit to the imperial project of conquest (25). In the Western film, Fojas finds that the protagonist heroes travel into the borderlands and “make a run for the border” in order to ‘seek profits, pleasures and escape the legal and cultural restrictions of the north’ (25). The border in these films, according to Fojas, serves as another stock character: “a symbolic zone, a line between opposing forces and values, a line separating barbarism from civilization, the horizon of modernity, and the outer limit of a nation” (25). Fojas, in line with Berlant and my own perception of popular visual culture also argues that the Western film genre also participates in the production of the national narrative, “part of
the many texts and symbols of the myth of the United States as capital of the Americas” (25).

In her study of cultural performance, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor studies how scenarios function as sites for the embodied transmission of memory and desires. Taylor tells us that “[t]he discoverer, conqueror, ‘savage,’ and native princess, for example might be staple characters in many Western scenarios” (28). She finds in her work that scenarios, like that of the discovery of the Americas, are “meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes” (28). Taylor describes scenarios as powerful tools whose “portable framework bears the weight of accumulative repeats” (28). In the case of the frontier scenario, we shall see in this study how writers, photographers, editors, and television directors re-stage and re-create, yet again, the frontier scenario in order to project and occlude contemporary heroes and threats. The stock elements of the Western frontier that Fojas studies in border films are re-staged in the frontier scenario in the outdoor magazines, in order to do much of the same representational work. As Taylor highlights, the scenario is “formulaic […] and often banal because it leaves out complexity, reduces conflict to its sock elements, and encourages fantasies of participation” (54). Taylor signals that scenarios are “re-activated” functioning as a ‘bridge between the future in the past, never for the first time and never for the last’ (*Archive and Repertoire* 58). In the case of the frontier scenarios that we see re-produced and re-activated in these objects of visual culture, I ask what is the formula that is re-performed, what are the complexities of the conflicts that are
disappeared and what desires are expressed and performed via visual participation, or blinding, as the case may be.

I also owe my use of the term “disappearance” to Taylor, who in *Disappearing Acts*, studies the performative and spectacular nature of national identity construction and gendering. Taylor’s work provides useful insights for reading the spectacle of border security and migrant detention and its relation to what does and does not belong in its imaginary. In particular, Taylor’s term *percepticide*: the act of making the visible seemingly invisible through the “self-blinding of the general population” (123 *Disappearing Acts*) provides a constructive and critical analytical tool for studying the deployment of the detention spectacle and the frontier scenario. Following Taylor, I repeatedly ask what is being made visible and invisible in these border spectacles.

**Unexpected Oppression: Anti-immigration Rhetoric and Outdoor Exploration Texts**

Since *National Geographic*, *National Geographic Adventure*, *Backpacker* and *Outside* magazines are considered to be, primarily, explorer texts, this designation may make their participation in public political discourse seemingly more oblique than that of *The Nation* or *Time*. However, as Mary Louise Pratt’s study of imperial travel writing, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, reminds us travelogues, (as we might also refer to them), are rarely, if ever, devoid of imperial practices and their subsequent narratives. As Stephanie Hawkins (2010) writes of *National Geographic* magazine, “[t]his powerful combination of science and imaginative transport, it is well

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known, often promoted a Western, and imperialist, view of the world” (9).

There are a number of critical studies of *National Geographic* magazine, many of which align with the critical reading I bring to the multiple *National Geographic* texts (print, television, web) analyzed here, as well as the non-*National Geographic* explorer texts. However, these studies do not examine more recent publications, from the last twenty years approximately, nor the more recent productions, such as the cable television channels, website(s) and their online multi-media content that I investigate here.

In a book review of Tamar Rothenberg’s (2007) *Presenting America’s World: Strategies of Innocence in National Geographic Magazine*, Stephanie Hawkins (2007) succinctly summarizes the critical readings of *National Geographic* that run parallel to my study. Hawkins signals how these studies tend to align in their critical readings of *National Geographic* magazine.9 Furthermore, Hawkins describes Rothenberg’s thesis as unsurprising for “those who are familiar with scholarship on the magazine” (162). Hawkins describes Rothenberg’s thesis in the following manner:

*National Geographic* manufactured consent through editorial policies that concealed political questions behind aesthetically-pleasing images and non-controversial subjects. Its photographs and texts, […], distilled human subjects into representatives of a timeless cultural essence and promoted U.S. moral and technological supremacy abroad. (162)

Therefore, when considering the critical body of work that already exists on

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9 Among the studies reviewed, Hawkins notes that Jane Lutz and Catherine Collins *Reading National Geographic* (1993) “inspired numerous critiques: of the magazine’s imperialist ideology […] of the society’s promotion of male explorers” and of its racist, sexist and anti-Semitic portrayals (162).
National Geographic magazine, it should come as less of a surprise to find imperial scenarios of frontier exploration re-activated in these adventure and exploration texts. Most of these critical readings of National Geographic mentioned above could be classified as deconstructive; As Steet describes her intervention in her work Veils and Daggers: “I can look at a 1924 National Geographic picture of Muslim pilgrims on their way to Mecca and think of my project as an attempt to slap the hand entering from the photograph’s left frame and holding open the woman’s robe, exposing her breast” (7). Hawkin’s own manuscript, American Iconographic: National Geographic, Global Culture, and the Visual Imagination (2010)10, studies critical readings of National Geographic such as the unpublished archived letters to editors, and parodies of the magazine found in other media. Hawkins, challenges not only National Geographic’s constructions, but also much of the aforementioned scholarship on National Geographic, questioning “just how much the so-called ‘manufacture of consent’ is a consequence of the manufacture of the public perception of consent not true consent”, arguing that “a culture of dissent existed alongside the magazine’s manufactured image of consent”. All of which “necessarily complicate our understanding of the magazine’s role in fostering visual cultural literacy (11). 

However, while my study recognizes the possibility for critical and even resistant readings, as should be evident by its own existence, direct forms of dissention, such as letters to editors or producers of the articles and television shows studied here, are beyond the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, this chapter works to critically read these
visual texts, in order to interpret the messages their creators seem to want viewers and readers to glean from these texts. In particular, this chapter works to identify that which is seemingly disappeared in this collection of visual culture.

Environmental Discourses: Protecting the Natural Environment for Some or for All?

As a starting point for reading these visual texts, it is paramount to keep in mind that most of them profess to subscribe to a mission of promoting environmental conservation. For example, *Backpacker* magazine refers to itself, on the cover of the February 2003 edition, as “The Magazine of Wilderness Travel” and as of 2011, *Backpacker* claims, on its website, that its mission is to: “… inspire and enable people to enjoy the outdoors by providing the most trusted and engaging information about backcountry adventure in North America” (“Backpacker Mission”) Both *Backpacker* and *National Geographic* magazines claim to promote environmental protection through education, exploration, travel and environmental conservation. The National Geographic Society, and its consumable products such as *National Geographic* magazine, *National Geographic Adventure* magazine and the *National Geographic* channel, and its television show *Border Wars*, apparently all work to fulfill the National Geographic mission of encouraging people to value the environment.

The National Geographic Society has been inspiring people to care about the planet since 1888. It is one of the largest non-profit scientific and educational institutions in the world. Its interests include geography,
Whereas National Geographic’s mission is “to inspire people to care about the planet”, much like that of Backpacker’s, Outside magazine, on the other hand, whose article “Border Showdown” is studied here, refreshingly addresses the political directly in its mission statement: “Back in 1978, a letter in Outside's first issue stated that the magazine was "dedicated to covering the people, sports and activities, politics, art, literature, and hardware of the outdoors," an editorial goal that has stuck ever since” (Outside: About”). Here Outside reminds us that environmental discourse is always already entrapped in political discourses and actions that reflect and reproduce uneven structures of power.

In other words, while being “green” may at first glance, not only seem benign but also generally beneficial for the planet and therefore its inhabitants, we must remember that pro-environmental discourse, practices and policies, often target disproportionately different groups of people.11 There are very few instances where environmental policies, practices or discourses account for, benefit or harm, all people equally, just as there are very few instances of environmental contamination and destruction that do not also occur along channels of difference. Conversely, there are certainly discourses concerned with environmental justice that target this issue of inequality directly. These discourses of environmental justice are not found however in the texts studied here. Therefore a

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reading of these explorer magazines and viewing of similar television programs must situate the exploration genre historically so as to not read these visual texts as surprising exceptions.

In this case, these texts could be situated within three broad and related fields and traditions: the U.S. environmental movement, the U.S. conservation movement, and the broader historical practice of exploration and subsequent creation and consumption of exploration texts. In its current form, the U.S. environmental movement might be too broad to classify given its myriad realizations from “green consumerism”, with questionable environmental impacts, to organizations such as Earth First. Nonetheless, in the broadest sense, the movement was born in the 1960s and highly influenced by Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* that signaled the dangers of toxic chemicals such as DDT in the biosphere, and served as inspiration and evidence for the eventual banning of DDT use in the U.S. But just as DDT’s production and sale abroad were not banned, this one example is emblematic not only of the U.S. environmental movement’s problematic “not in my backyard” protest tool, but is indicative of the complexity of what have come to be understood as “environmental issues” as they relate, in most cases, to particular populations and across lines of difference. For example, while population control is not an element of Carson’s groundbreaking text, it is decidedly one of the more controversial issues within the very broad U.S. and Western based “environmental movement”. Therefore, *Backpacker* and *National Geographic*’s, commitments to the protection of the environment and “wild” places cannot be easily dismissed as “green is good,” nor does they go un-problematized herein.
The second movement and related textual genre that relates to the explorer texts studied here is the equally broad U.S. conservation movement, whose de facto members, or nature writers, such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold and Edward Abbey could also be situated within the even broader tradition of explorers, travel writing and explorer texts.\(^\text{12}\) While travel writing and conservation writing in the U.S. can be divided (again very broadly) into two camps: between those texts that seek to conquer the wilderness and those that seek to preserve it,\(^\text{13}\) both have to sit, perhaps uncomfortably together wherein both imagine the “wilderness” as something separate from Western man and also as something, however abstract, that exists for particular uses—for even preservation exacts a particular kind of use.

The conservation movement and its literary expressions cannot be easily untangled from imperial travel writing and its relationship to imperial projects due to the similarities their texts share, such as the position of the narrator. Since imperial projects and their texts are not a thing of the past, perhaps one workable division that might be proposed between the two would be that of colonial versus post-colonial travel writing texts. “Pratt [(1982)] finds that in both colonial and contemporary postcolonial travel accounts the narrator is often looking down on an exotic scene from mountaintop or hotel balcony. This stance and its related stylistics she calls the-monarch-of-all-I-survey scene, giving its narrator the opportunity to examine and evaluate the whole and to thereby assert dominance over it” (Lutz and Collins 113). As Lutz and Collins note, Pratt signals


\(^{13}\) See Rodrick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* 1967 for discussion on the transformation of the concept of wilderness from uncivilized wasteland to wild country deserving preservation.
that the shift from colonial to post-colonial positioning of the monarch-of-all-I survey produces a very different description of the space. Where the colonial landscape is glorified by the narrator, producing what Lutz and Collins describe as a “colonial portrait cornucopic Eden” the post-colonial landscape is seen and described as “degraded, polluted and used up” (Lutz and Collins 114).

While a full review of the history of these movements and their related literary genres is beyond the scope of this project, they cannot be overlooked as many of the themes and discursive tools of imperial travel writing re-emerge and are re-deployed in the explorer texts studied here. In other words, I find that the texts studied here reconstruct the frontier scenario that emerged in the writing, and world view, of colonial and westward expansion, and in so doing, these texts use the frontier scenario to stage and frame the public discussion that configures migrants, citizens, sovereignty and the U.S. – Mexico border.

Frontier Adventure in the Wilderness: Defining the Borderlands

McGivney’s article “Wildest Park in America: We Dare you to Hike it!” in *Backpacker* begins with a two-page lay-out and the invitation to its readers: “[w]ant a taste of old-fashioned frontier adventure? Come to Organ Pipe National Monument, a park with many faces—nearly all of them dangerous” (42). This header overlies the first two of nine images. This two-page photographic introduction features a contrast between a cholla cactus, to the left, and an extreme close-up photo of the chest, shoulder and neck of the border patrol agent on the right-hand page. However, this cholla has been photographically altered to be pink—eight of the nine photographs by Steve Howe have a
pink hue on some of the elements in the frame, making pink all that would be presumably green, and reducing most photos to a pallet of pink, blue, black, white and gray. With these opposing photographs, McGivney and Howe\textsuperscript{14} begin the process of differentiating the various elements of the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (OPCNM) and constructing a threatened feminized space that is subsequently in need of vigilant masculine protectors. However, it is important to note that the protectors are also envisioned as threatened—above the Border Patrol agent’s left shoulder reads the caption: “Endangered Species: In Organ Pipe both the cactus (cholla chainfruit, left) and the cops are in danger of being overrun” (43).

Here I pay close attention to the construction and use of photographic anchors as an integral part of the formation of the message transmitted to readers. As Roland Barthes describes the semiotic process of interpreting an image, in this case the combination of photographic images and written text, meaning is formed at different levels of signification. In his much-referenced chapter “Rhetoric of the image”, Barthes examines how images have denotative and connotative significations. Barthes studies advertising images, and in particular the relationship between the visual image and its anchor: the written text that accompanies the image. However, in the absence of an anchor, the photograph still has what Barthes refers to as denotative and connotative meanings. The denotative message, utopic in its conception, refers to the literal message. In the case of the *Backpacker* photo, the photograph of a Border Patrol agent’s shoulder

\textsuperscript{14}While the role of editors is surely important to the final layout in all of the objects of visual culture studied here, all referrals to writers and photographers work in this chapter also assumes one or more editors also participated in the construction of the objects under study here.
is to denote literally, and no more, the shoulder of a man, and agent of the state.

However, as Barthes highlights, the denotative message exists in relation to the connoted meanings, that is the associated conceptions that the viewer has. The connotated significations are coded by cultural and historic contexts and interpretations. For instance, the image of a Border Patrol agent can carry a variety of significations with it, especially in different contexts and among different audiences. The connotative signification relies on the cultural perspective of its interpreter. Barthes demonstrates that anchors are used to help limit the myriad potential interpretations of an image and to “fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs” (37) emphasis in original. The anchor then works to reign in the possible denoted meanings: “the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others” (37-38) emphasis in original. By telling defining the Border Patrol agent as an “endangered species” McGivney attempts to portray these armed security agents as under-threat, directing readers to avoid seeing these men as dangerous and violent, or to be feared. As Barthes writes,

> The text is indeed the creator’s (and hence society’s) right of inspection over the image; anchorage is a control, bearing a responsibility—in the face of the projective power of pictures—for the use of the message. With respect to the liberty of the signifieds of the image, the text has thus a *repressive* value and we can see that it is at this level that the morality and ideology of a society are above all invested (38) emphasis in original.
Barthes was quite cognizant of the myth of photographic truth, and therefore his reference to the “liberty of signifieds” needs to be understood in the context of the larger importance he placed on the power and interpretation of the meanings of images. We are reminded of this in the combination of McGivney’s text and Howe’s photos, whose pink hue already reminds us of the mediated qualities of the photograph. As we see in the McGivney *Backpacker* article, her text is combined with his photographs so as to help readers interpret the elements in the OPCNM, and in particular, to help them distinguish the threatened elements from the threats.

Of the nine photographs that accompany the McGivney article five have a primary, or secondary, subject that is (pink) flora. One of the flora photos also features a black plastic jug and another is of women’s underwear on a saguaro cactus. The other four photos have men as their primary subject: park ranger, two shots of border patrol agent, and another of a young man titled “Migrant or Drug Smuggler?” McGivney also divides her article into six subsections and in so doing characterizes the OPCNM for her readers. These subsections are titled: “It is a Migrant Highway,” “It is a Garbage Dump,” “It is a Drug Battle Ground,” “It is an Oven,” “It is an Occupied Territory,” and, last but not least, “It is a Beautiful Place to Hike”. The article is followed by a small section of three recommended hikes, titled: “Safe Havens: 3 Alien-Free Border Hikes”. In what follows, I use the organizational structure of the McGivney article as an outline for critically analyzing all of the other objects of visual culture studied. I find that these same themes are reproduced and utilized across this collection of images and texts. Following

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15 See Appendix A.
Taylor’s notion of scenario, by paying attention to the forms that are repeated we can become familiar with the “formulaic structure” of the frontier scenario and the knowledge it attempts to transfer (Archive and Repertoire 58). As Taylor sees the scenario, it is …a paradigm that is formulaic, portable, repeatable, and often banal because it leaves out complexity, reduces conflict to its stock elements, and encourages fantasies of participation. The lack of complexity need not suggest that the scenario cannot provoke an affective reaction or conjure up multiple deep-seated fears and fantasies (Archive and Repertoire 54).

The “Migrant Highway” and the “Garbage Dump”: Imagining Migrants as Polluting Invaders

I combine the “Migrant Highway” and the “Garbage Dump” sections because, as McGivney tells her readers, the Sweetwater Pass in the OPCNM is a migrant highway easily identified by the “trail of trash” left by migrants (44-45). “Pants, cans, shoes, bicycles, phone cards, socks, a protractor, a Bible, underwear. And enough plastic water jugs to choke a landfill” (45). McGivney bemoans the current conditions of the monument, which she describes as very distinct from the peaceful conditions she found there only a few years prior, when also writing about the monument.16 She aligns her experiences with those of interviewee Bill Broyles and his 30 plus years hiking in the OPCNM and neighboring Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge. McGivney describes Broyles as a ‘desert rat’, among the likes of the late Edward Abbey, although she does not mention in the article that Broyles is a local writer and author of a number of books

16 See McGivney in Backpacker Feb 2001 “The Big Empty”.
on the Sonoran Desert and the OPCNM. McGivney laments that prior to increases in migrant crossings, the monument had been for Broyles, as he describes it, “‘an empty quadrant—a reservoir of silence’” where “the odds of running into a Gila monster were far greater than those of running into another human” and that it is now a place that is being “trampled” and “trashed” by thousands of “illegal aliens” (44-45). According to Broyles and McGivney, the Sweetwater Pass used to require a map and compass to follow, but “now more than 100 people cross the pass every day, all heading for the promised land. Their path is three feet wide, part of a multilane highway connecting south to north, poor to rich, drug producer to drug consumer” (45).

McGivney informs her readers that the “flood of illegal immigration” that swelled in the 1970s and 1980s, which she attributes to America’s [sic] appetite for drugs and cheap labor, without mention of economic factors in sending communities, shifted into the desert in the 1990s.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) thought the forbidding, waterless terrain of Organ Pipe, the Cabeza, and Big Bend National Park in Texas would deter them. It didn’t. Border Patrol apprehensions from the agency’s Ajo station (just north of Organ Pipe) increased 30 fold between 1994 and 2001. Today, there are more illegal immigrants in the United States than ever, some 8 million. Difference is, they’re coming through Bill Broyles’ desert. (45 emphasis added)

While McGivney attributes the increases in migrant traffic in the desert to increases in border security in urban centers, the Border Patrol’s argument that these changes would
deter migrants are more debatable, but they are not problematized by McGivney.

McGivney focuses less on the fact that increased border security has pushed migrants to cross in ever more precarious places, and instead emphasizes her, (and others’), concern that these places, i.e. Bill Broyle’s personal refuge, are being “trashed” by said migrants. As McGivney highlights, it is not the case that people do not belong in the park, it is just that only certain people, in small quantities belong there, namely “permit bearing backpackers” (44).

Charles Bowden’s “Our Wall”17 article does mention that the initiation of NAFTA contributed to the devastation of the peasant-agricultural economy in Mexico and contributed to increases in undocumented immigration to the U.S., particularly in places like the Arizona desert. However, ultimately Bowden focuses very little on the multiple political and economic factors influencing immigration to the U.S. and instead works to construct the border and borderlands as a place of violent problems and contrasting binaries, ultimately separating the protectors of a pristine, yet inhospitable and vacated natural environment from its polluting threats and thereby signaling who does and does not belong in the borderlands.

The on-line version of the Bowden article includes a photo gallery, with sixteen photos, and field notes from Bowden as well as field notes from the photographers Diane Cook and Len Jenshel.18 The photo gallery begins with the border wall in Tijuana and ends at its easternmost point outside of Ciudad Juárez. The U.S.- Mexican border wall, or

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17 In this chapter, I study the on-line version of Bowden’s article. The article was also published in print in National Geographic magazine’s May 2007 edition.
18 See Appendix B.
more specifically border walls, is the focus of Bowden’s article and the photographs. The images are primarily long shots in which a border wall, or fence, occupies a central space in the frame. There is only one image with visible people, but their presence and/or absence, and more importantly, their traces, are all central features used to construct the article’s message.

Bowden works to describe and demonstrate a (read his) “reluctant” desire for heightened U.S. border security throughout the article by defining borders as inherently violent. He uses his descriptions of the violent characteristics of borders so as to justify his support for greater policing.

Borders everywhere attract violence, violence prompts fences, and eventually fences can mutate into walls. […] We seem to love walls, but are embarrassed by them because they say something unpleasant about the neighbors—and us. They flow from two sources: fear and the desire for control. […] They give us divided feelings because we do not like to admit we need them.

This language attempts to reflexively excuse Bowden from his own calls for greater securitization of the borderlands by sustaining his arguments by descriptions of violence. In this way, Bowden attempts to maintain his position as a leftward leaning writer while he simultaneously casts the border as naturally violent and describes what can be read as his own shame of his desire to have the border militarily controlled.

In spite of Bowden’s “apprehension” to admit the necessity of heightened and maintained border fencing and security, he, as in the other visual texts studied here,
constructs his article so as to repeatedly demonstrate that the U.S.-Mexico border is inherently and historically violent, citing skirmishes from the Mexican Revolution and Patrick Murphy’s accidental bombing of Naco, Arizona, (“the wrong Naco”), in 1929, as evidence for the border’s intrinsic promulgation of violence. While Bowden does suggest that borders are places where acts of sovereignty are performed, (“fear and the desire for control,”) Bowden continually signals that the violence and un-desirable behavior that the U.S. – Mexico border attracts is not that of the enactment of state sovereignty but rather that it is a violence that originates in Mexico, and thereby necessitates increased border fencing on the part of the U.S. State. Furthermore, through Bowden’s stereotyping of Mexico and Mexicans he ultimately advocates for increased securitization and militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, and thereby undoes all allusions of reluctance or “embarrassment” of his desire for greater security.

In many circles, Bowden, via his writing, is considered to be a liberal in the U.S. political landscape. For instance, he is an editor for *Mother Jones* magazine, and has been interviewed on programs such as *Democracy Now*¹⁹ regarding Mexican, or U.S.-Mexico

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¹⁹ Bowden was on *Democracy Now* on April 14, 2010. In this interview, he blames neoliberal policy for creating and exacerbating poverty in Mexico, and having devastating effects in Juárez: “What we’ve created, with a foreign policy, meaning our free trade treaty, is, one, slave factories all over the country, where nobody can live on the wages, two generations at least of feral kids on the street. Fifty percent of the kids you call high school kids in Juárez neither go to school nor have jobs. They did a recent university study there, and they found out 40 percent of the kids in Chihuahua, young males, wanted to become *sicarios*, professional killers”. However in *Mother Jones* “Exodus: Border Crossers Forge a New America” September-October 2006, Bowden places the blame for the lowering of blue-collar wages on the arrival of cheap labor from Mexico, and not on the union busting that accompanied it: “There are no honest players in this game. People cut the cards to fit their ideology. More Mexicans come north than either government admits. They do take jobs. (They say Mexicans take jobs Americans refuse to do. This is probably true in some instances. But in the mid–1960s slaughterhouse workers earned twice the current wage for their toil. Now such jobs are held by Mexicans.) They do commit crimes. And if the arrival of millions of poor people in the United States does not drive down wages, then surely there is a Nobel Prize to be earned in studying this remarkable exception to the law of supply and demand. / They are no longer migratory
border issues as the case may be. However, within the field of critical cultural studies, Bowden’s work and expertise are problematized. For example, as Sandra Soto highlights in her article “Seeing through photographs of Borderlands (Dis)order”, Bowden’s, *Ciudad Juárez: Laboratory for our Future?*, in an attempt to visually document the violence and social conditions of Ciudad Juárez, is among the texts that are “uncritically framed by a discursive narrative of order and disorder, such that contemporary capitalism is seen as wreaking havoc on tradition, community, a liberal notion of “freedom,” and gender relations – all of which are putatively positioned outside of or before capitalism”.

Soto highlights that the “realist tools of documentary evidence” such as the photographs used in Bowden’s book, make them susceptible to uncritical viewing. Soto argues that “while the visual documentation of suffering on the border to tell this story of order and disorder might bring into sharper (and more affective) relief the tangibly devastating effects of uneven processes of globalization, it also lends itself to a reification of the culture of poverty narrative” (418). In the case of Bowden’s *National Geographic* “Our Wall”, his documentation of the border fails to critically analyze the larger neoliberal security paradigm that frames the latest militarization efforts on the U.S.-Mexico border. Instead Bowden re-stages the frontier scenario, which effectively distracts from and simplifies the socio-political factors involved in crossing the border—reducing complex issues into familiar and more easily digestible pieces.

*workers. And it is not seasonal labor. The people walking north all around me are not going home again. This is an exodus from a failed economy and a barbarous government and their journey is biblical*. 
The rusty metal border fence dominates the right side of the photo, place-marked “Tijuana”. To the left, the impoverished shantytown with its stray dog seemingly extends to infinity. On the U.S. side, the open space is blurry and also seemingly unending. Cook and Jenshel have captured some of the essential elements so as to mark the differences between the two countries and connote poverty to the south: a pile of discarded tires, dirt roads, shanties and the stray dog. In order to further “fix” the intended message, the photo is tagged with the following description:

[an improvised wall of military surplus steel cuts a rusty slash toward the horizon. In Tijuana, where poverty is rising and half of all new residents live in squatter communities without clean water, the wall is hard to ignore: Houses push up close to the border. On the U.S. side, development is far removed from the barrier.

This photo and its description, work with the others in the set to construct an image of Mexico and Mexicans as distinct from the elements on the U.S. side. Through these binary images, Bowden, and his photographers, visually begin to construct and signal that which is threatening: Mexico and Mexicans, and ultimately needs to be contained and/or brought into line with the Northern expectations. As Soto finds in her study of Bowden’s Ciudad Juárez: Laboratory for our Future?, “So too could Bowden’s photographs of disorder be used as perfect evidence for the need to bring Juárez into the ordered fold of development. Meanwhile, anti-immigrant hysteria in the US has a new readily available batch of fuel in the form of photographs that do not lie” (426). In this way, Bowden’s article also does the work of re-producing the civilizing discourse that underpins and
justifies imperial projects.

The central spacing of the border wall or fence in many the photographs that accompany the Bowden article, as well as the emphasis on demonstrating differences from one side to the other, allows Bowden (and his photographers) to project a separation of, or a desire to separate, that which is deemed criminal or out-of-control, imagined as coming from the south, from that which is imagined as controlled or in need of protection, to the north. For example, in the photo, “Ciudad Juárez” Bowden further delineates between the U.S. and Mexico, imagining additional Mexican criminals in his description. The caption reads: “[f]reight rolls a few feet north of Mexico on a line repeatedly hit by train robbers unfazed by border fences. Here, the easternmost man-made barrier on the international frontier ends abruptly near the Rio Grande.” The image captures garbage strewn about on both sides of the fence and to the north a symbol of western expansion, a train with cargo containers, signals the booming commerce of the U.S. However, the graffiti marked and opened-ended wall is indicative of the impending danger to the “westward” progress of capitalism to the north, a threat whose protagonists are none other than train robbers from the south. Richard Dyer writes that the process of creating stereotypes is not only one in which the Other is not only reduced to a series of basic characteristics, but also a process in which that which is deemed “normal” is separated, divided from and excluded from that which is determined to be “abnormal”. Dyer further emphasizes that the creation of borders and barriers works to carry out these exclusions.
Bowden’s article further contributes to the portrayal of Mexico and Mexicans as polluted and polluting with the photograph “Backyard Fence”. The title locates the photo in the domestic space and the image is one of a view from Mexico into the U.S., through two fences. The first is a homemade fence of wire and Ocotillo cactus and the second the corrugated and rusty steel border fence. The bed of a pickup truck, with approximately twenty empty Tecate beer cans, dominates the lower right quadrant of the photo. To the left, yet again, is another tire propped up against the fence. I am reminded here of William Nericcio’s reading of the Speedy Gonzalez short-film Cannery Woe in which Speedy’s inebriated friends live in a sardine can in the garbage heap outside the cannery. Nerricio signals that while Speedy’s friend’s living accommodations are open to a variety of interpretations, the easier, more prevalent stereotype is more likely to prevail: “I imagine that one might read this representation as a sign of Mexican ingenuity—that these resourceful veracruzano mice had gainfully turned rags to riches, tin can into cherished castle. But it is a bit of a stretch, don’t you think? ‘Mexicans live in shanty structures made of trash’ seems the easier read (130 emphasis in original).

The cumulative effect of these photographs, and their descriptors, like the infinite images of Speedy Gonzalez, is the further re-creation of a stereotyped Mexico and Mexicans, that are associated with poverty and drunkenness, and in the case of the objects of visual culture studied herein, dangerous behavior and lawlessness. We are reminded here of Barthes’ notions of anchorage and relay, where in photographic anchors aid in the control and designation of meaning through the combination of, and movement through the text and image. The “Backyard Fence” photo descriptor reads: “A homemade
fence decorates a backyard in the Sonoran border town of Naco, across the road from the barrier that separates it from the Arizona border town of the same name. The Naco area has been one of the major entry points for undocumented migrants heading north”.

Bowden\textsuperscript{20} separates the U.S. border walls, which he “reluctantly” describes as unfortunate necessities, from Mexican fences which he designates as “decorative”—a description that not only elides Ocotillo’s sharp functionality, but that also works to further imagine that only the U.S. nation space and its citizens need and/or desire the protections that fences provide.

In “Purity and Danger on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1991-1994” Sara Hill studies the discursive representation of the border and its natural environment in mainstream U.S. media. Hill finds that the U.S.-Mexico border and its Mexican inhabitants are portrayed by the mass media as toxic dangers in the run-up to, and in particular in opposition to, the enactment of NAFTA. Hill also finds that even while jumping from place to place along the border, the media coverage tends to present “each [place] as characteristic of a larger, seamless geography with discernible features: illegal immigration, poverty, booming industrialization, and filth. […] Repetition of the form provided the building blocks from which the whole—‘the border’—was eventually constructed” (788-789). Hill coincides with Chávez, wherein both argue that the numerous treatments of the U.S.-Mexico border in popular U.S. media tend to repeat particular messages, almost always discussing immigration and signaling that Mexico and Mexicans pose various forms of threat to the neighbor to the north.

\textsuperscript{20} I attribute all photographs descriptions to the article author as evidence that the photographers or editors wrote them is not available.
McGivney and Bowden both tend to further repeat the messages that are outlined by Chávez and Hill. Both writers, (with their photographers and editors,) contrast photos of garbage, either south of the border, or presumably left by migrants north of the border, and descriptions of inadequate plumbing (south of the border) against images of “open” and “natural” environments in the north—environments that need protection because they are contaminated and “overrun” to use McGivney’s term. Hill argues, “nativist movements […] have found environmental imagery a particularly potent tool in producing anti-immigrant sympathy” (781). By reproducing binaries in which a threatened north and its environment is posited against a threatening south, McGivney and Bowden tend to participate in and further reproduce anti-immigrant nativist discourse. Nativist discourse is a central element of the frontier scenario, wherein it allows Bowden and McGivney to project and justify their desires to protect and control the borderlands and its natural environment.

Following Nicolas De Genova (2005), we see here how Bowden and McGivney, in spite of their leftist leanings, adopt “the native’s point of view”, which allows both liberals and conservatives to authorize themselves as natives in order to debate migratory policies, and as a consequence, the place of the migrant in the national space and imaginary. According to De Genova, nativism authorizes the native, based on the qualification of being native, to decide who should or should not enter the national space. In Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago, De Genova studies how nativist discourses work to construct both the native and the migrant,
in order to exclude (i.e. silence and/or remove) the migrant. De Genova defines “nativism” and “the native’s point of view” as:

a crucial feature of nationalism that helps to resolve the problem posed for any nation-state by the contingency of the nation through a kind of hegemonic identity politics that promotes the priority of ‘natives’ over ‘immigrants,’ simply on the basis of their being native. […] In this light, nativism tends to ground claims not only against immigration but also in favor of it, by always evaluating migration from the standpoint of citizens who authorize themselves to debate the question in terms of what is good for ‘the nation’ (7 my emphasis).

De Genova further signals:

[s]uch a teleology, elaborated in terms of outsiders coming in, presumably to stay, could be posited only from the epistemological standpoint of the migrant-receiving U.S. nation-state, on the parts of those who authorize themselves to speak as its natives—what I will call, with deliberate irony, ‘the natives point of view’ (58 emphasis in original).

Following De Genova, a reading of the objects of visual culture studied here reveals how they repeatedly construct binaries between the U.S. nation state and its threatening Others and in so doing authorize themselves, as natives, to simultaneously imagine and debate the place of Mexicans and border crossers in this space—envisioning what is good and bad for the nation and its citizens. Furthermore, De Genova also helps us understand how it is that anti-immigrant discourse is reproduced in outdoor exploration texts—places
where we expect liberal writers to not reproduce such rhetoric. In the case of these magazines, the writers all seem to have fallen into a nativist-trap: having authorized themselves to debate the place of migrants in what they perceive to be their landscapes, and then finding those migrants to be threatening, they find themselves, maybe reluctantly, advocating for the more familiar solution in the frontier scenario—militarized security.

As mentioned above, one of the ways threats to the U.S. nation from the south are constituted is by constructing them, in the first instance, as outsiders, i.e. migrants, and subsequently imagining them as polluting and destructive so as to pit them against the inhabitants of the U.S. borderlands, who are imagined as “protectors” of this “pristine” space, i.e. the park rangers and Border Patrol agents. Here images of Border Patrol Agents and Park Rangers, photographed in their uniforms, work to signal who has the power to protect. This trope is not only used in the magazines studied here but is also repeated, and serves as much of the focus, in the television shows *Border Wars* and *Homeland Security USA*. The visual image of the uniformed man, serves to signify authorized security—security that is advocated for through the focus on violence from the south, as opposed to military violence and the violence of poverty.

In *Outside* magazine’s 2003 article on the OPCNM, “Border Showdown”, Bruce Barcott writes: “[w]hile politicians wrangle, rangers continue working in a dangerous climate, and the parks are getting trashed. Smugglers have left Organ Pipe—95 percent of which is officially designated wilderness—blemished with tons of garbage and dozens of junked vehicles. More than 100 miles of roads and trails have been carved into the
backcountry” (20). Also in National Geographic’s online news forum, “Arizona Park
‘Most Dangerous’ in U.S.” Tom Clynes writes of the Organ Pipe:

In the park's rugged backcountry, migrants and smugglers have cut
hundreds of new trails, trampled plants, and strewn water jugs and other
garbage through the once-pristine desert. They have disrupted the habitat
of the park's population of endangered Sonoran pronghorn antelope, a shy
and reclusive species already gravely stressed by a drought.

Hill writes that the natural environment of the border was crafted and invented in
the 1990s as part of a larger anti-NAFTA discourse. Writing in 2006, Hill finds that
discourses about the protection of the border environment have diminished in recent
years, giving way to anti-immigration and anti-terrorism discourses. Furthermore, Hill
also finds through historical study, citing Chávez and De Genova (2002), that

…in the 1970s and 1980s, a ‘border’ story was almost always an
immigration story, with the exception of a handful of stories that appeared
in the late 1980s, which focused not on illegal immigration of Mexicans to
the U.S. but on the effects of American firms that had migrated the south
[sic] of the border to set up shop to produce goods for the U.S. market and
in so doing frequently took advantage of Mexico’s anemic enforcement of
pollution regulations. (784)

Hill argues that the change from concern about the environment to concern about
terrorism reveals that the real focus of border news is “almost always” “illegal”
immigration, for which the environment was a temporary substitute:
environmental concerns have faded at least in part because the environment was never truly the focus of popular opposition; rather, it stood in for, albeit sometimes inadvertently, the belief that the Mexican immigrant was the real source of pollution. [...] [T]he environment depicted in the NAFTA media coverage was so alarming, even to Americans living far from the border, because this environment mimicked something already inherently antipathetic and threatening to many Americans: Mexican Immigration. (778)

In Hill’s estimation, concern for pollution that could result from NAFTA was deployed so as to support broader anti-immigration discourse and practices.21 However, because “concern for the environment” is presumably a sincere motivator for the creators and writers of Backpacker, Outside, National Geographic and National Geographic Adventure magazines, the ways in which the threats versus the protectors of the U.S. southern borderlands and its environment are envisioned, as well as for whom and what uses its natural environment exists, demonstrate and reproduce particular nativist perspectives rooted in histories of frontierism. This particular nativist frontier discourse, I would argue, is not necessarily anti-immigration in the first instance, but rather is a discourse that envisions the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a frontier space that is to be occupied, controlled and even enjoyed by the nativist inhabitant-explorer. Therefore, in this case, concern for the environment is not necessarily a stand-in for

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21 Curiously, it is worth noting that the outcome of this opposition lead to the addition of some environmental amendments to the NAFTA documents. All the while, migratory labor remains intentionally excluded.
concern about immigration but rather concern for the control of space, signaling a deeper desire to create, maintain, control and “enjoy” the frontera as frontier, and therefore exclude others from this space. As opposed to being anti-NAFTA and anti-immigrant, as Hill finds of the media of the early 1990s, I find that the frontera/frontier visual discourses studied herein tend to produce anti-immigrant sentiment and in so doing they tend to promote the basic tenets of NAFTA, wherein they do the discursive work of neoliberal agendas: extending market values and an ethos of privatization and personal responsibility to all social institutions, including democratic citizenship, turning some in towards the benefits of the neoliberal regime while exposing many to its dangers.

In this next section, I will explain how these objects of visual culture, perhaps unwittingly, create nativist and frontier discourses and how these discourses do representative and constitutive work within the neoliberal dispositif. Wherein Hill finds that concern for the environment stands in for concerns about immigration, I would extend Hill’s line of thinking and argue that concern for the environment, coupled with concerns about immigration, signals a deeper preoccupation with, and desire to, control who belongs in the U.S. borderlands and subsequently who belongs in the U.S. nation space. As Hill writes in reference to Bruce Braun’s study of cultural and environmental politics of Canada’s temperate rainforests,

the materiality of any environment is an epistemological problem, one that is both posed and solved (in part) by representation in the media. And as Braun also observed, whether or not humans appear in representations of nature does not fully disguise the fact that such representations implicitly
express a human imprint on nature. While it might be hard to see ‘culture’ in pictures of ‘pristine’ nature, Braun argues that images of nature always imply where humans belong (far from nature) and don’t belong (in nature), unless the humans depicted are of nature (e.g., First Nations).

(780-781)

By paying special attention to the ways in which the visual culture studied herein constructs the borderlands environment, and indicates who does and does not belong in that space, it becomes apparent that not all humans are to be vacated from the borderlands, but rather that the natural environment of the borderlands is imagined as belonging to, and to be used and explored by particular peoples, preferably the “rugged individual” coded as white, U.S. citizen, and usually, male. By deploying the frontier scenario in this way, the space of the borderlands becomes a place with particular uses and functions—and it becomes a border whenever the act of sovereignty is re-performed.

In her work on the discursive construction of the border environment in the run-up to NAFTA, Hill finds that the media of this time period tends to collapse and/or compare migrants with nature and natural forces. In particular, following Chávez, Hill argues that water imagery is the most salient and important trope in the thickening of nativism and metaphoric language in popular media’s treatments of the border and immigration issues. Hill finds that the water trope allows the media to present immigration as an urgent crisis and a struggle against nature, and the border as penetrable and thereby unable to stem the steady flow of migrants. “In other words water imagery suggests that immigrants possess a natural essence that threatens American culture and
civilization. This, in turn, has helped characterize the border as a zone unlike the rest in the United States, one that is *naturally*—by virtue of the Mexican immigrant presence there—not American” (Hill 785-786 emphasis in original). While Bowden and McGivney do not tend to rely heavily on the water metaphor, (McGivney does use the phrase “the flood of illegal immigration” once,) they do tend to compare migrants to, or collapse them with, natural threats. Bowden compares the U.S.-Mexico border to a variety of international borders and compares Mexican immigration to the U.S. with the Australian rabbit as invasive species problem.

In Naco all the walls of the world are present in one compact bundle. You have Hadrian’s Wall or the Great Wall of China because the barrier is intended to keep people out. You have the Maginot Line because a 15-minute walk takes you to the end of the existing steel wall. You have the rabbit fences of Australia because people still come north illegally, as do the drugs. (4)

Bowden describes the Australian rabbit problem in terms that signal both an unstoppable force of nature and, perhaps more disturbingly, attempts at extermination: “…the rabbits had overrun the continent. […] the Australian government has tried various solutions: imported fleas, poisons, trappers. Nothing has dented the new immigrants. The fences themselves failed almost instantly—rabbits expanded faster than the barriers could be built…” (4).

In the sources studied here, as well as in the television shows, I find that border crossers are either compared to the natural dangers of the desert, like the extreme heat
and aridity, or they are overlapped with the venomous creatures such as fire ants, tarantulas, rattlesnakes and scorpions. Where migrants are not compared to other kinds of “natural” threats, I find that they are often already interpolated into militaristic rhetoric and imagined as enemies of war, i.e. “Parks under Siege” by Tim Vanderpool, “National Park War Zone” by Clynes and “Border Showdown” by Barcott, Border Wars, HSUSA, as well as the “Drug Battle Ground” section in McGivney. By pitting these “enemies” against the “protectors” of the open landscapes and/or desert fauna of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the objects of visual culture studied here communicate a desire to associate the United States’ border space with “pure nature,” thereby subsequently constructing the presence of migrants in this space as threatening “dilution[s] of its cultural purity” (Chávez 226).

“Victoria’s Dirty Secret” and The “Swiss Miss”: Ventriloquizing Contaminating and Vulgar Migrants

The reproduction of the frontier scenario relies upon the production and definition of sources of purity and danger in order for the scenario to be intelligible. A pure U.S. nation is imagined through the construction of visual discourses that codifies migrants as deviant and vulgarized impurities that are then projected against the image of a pure, and threatened U.S. nation. While this chapter deals primarily with the representation of the U.S.-Mexico border in print media, I find that the next set of examples, drawn from magazines and the television show Homeland Security USA work together in particularly synergistic and terrifying ways. I treat them together here because they represent pieces
of everyday material in popular public discourse, as Berlant might say, in which we can observe the production of oppressive optimism.

In the first episode of *HSUSA*, one of the ‘threats’ to the nation that is constructed is that of a woman named Nora, who travels with a Swiss passport and claims to be seeking work as a belly dancer in the US. The off-screen narrator refers to her as the “Swiss Miss”. While various episodes of *HSUSA* often feature the visible forced stripping of men to reveal drugs taped to their legs and midsections, in the “Swiss Miss” scene, spectators have to imagine her strip tease through the cross-cutting of her cleavage and the search of her luggage that reveals her “exotic” (and seemingly mysterious to the officers) belly dancing clothing and accessories. The art form is automatically transported to the sphere of vulgarity and exoticism, signaling anxieties on the part of those producing these images about representations of sexualities.

Furthermore, this scene dredges up and restages a simultaneous fear and fascination with an Oriental other. This scene also makes visible what Donnalee Dox (2006) and Barbara Sellers-Young and Anthony Shay (2005), following Edward Said (1978) have signaled as the complicated process in which the Western adoption and adaptation of belly dancing, while attempting to re-interpret the art form as a rejection of Western patriarchy, as well as that of the East, by transforming the dancer from the object of the gaze to the agent of the art form, nonetheless remain entrapped in Orientalizing processes. Dox signals that at one level, the Western practice of “belly-dancing” elides the practices the popularity and public acceptability of women dancing, including “belly dancing” in public in the West is quite distinct from the social (un)acceptability of
women’s dancing in Egypt for instance: “The ease with which a woman can display her body in public is itself a cultural value and it is not universal” (Dox 56). Furthermore, in spite of the Western “celebration” of these dance forms, Dox notes that “Western belly dancing challenges the Orientalist frame in that it critiques Western culture by giving positive value to Orientalism’s critiques of the East, but at the same time validates the Western ideologies and aesthetics at the very core of Orientalism” (53).

However, in this episode of *HSUSA*, the belly dancing that Nora intends to perform is not represented as the artistic form that is often displayed in public festivals and private dance studios in the U.S. Rather, the denial of Nora’s agency, and the ultimate reading of her body, belongings and intentions by the agents of the state and the camera re-transport her and the dance to its Orientalist frame, constructing her as both a threatening yet exotic object of the gaze.

The ultimate denial of the “Swiss Miss” to enter the national space also demonstrates the corrupted or impure nature of a woman onto whose body *HSUSA* constructs its arguments. The image of the gloved agent’s hands sorting through Nora’s suitcase signals the imagination of the impurity and danger implied by her belly dancing accessories. Nora’s impurity is then contrasted with the purity of the nation, which is signaled in the images of mothers and children passing through airport security checkpoints and the noble TSA agent’s desire to protect them. As Troy Patterson (2009) describes it on *Slate.com*:

The most telling moment of *Homeland Security USA*’s debut comes at its misty-eyed end. Returning to LAX, whence Nora has been cast out to
shake her moneymaker on other shores, the narrator reports that ‘many travelers become frustrated by post-9/11 security measures.’ We watch passengers gripe about being relieved of bottled water and dry ice and beauty cream—pettiness that gets drowned in a sap as a piano goes dribbling over the scene and an earnest TSA agent addressed an off-screen interviewer. ‘There are families every day that come through here,’ he says. Ah yes, but what about the children? Cue the footage of the children, with their pudgy little legs and cute little transitional objects. ‘My kids fly,’ the agent continues through a lump in his throat. ‘That’s the best point. When these people come in here, they’re my responsibility. When my kids fly, they’re my responsibility. I’m gonna protect my own’. (2)

Here as Patterson describes it, *HSUSA* imagines the U.S., as embodied in an innocent white child, as it collapses Nora with the other migrants who are either detained or denied entry in the show. In these examples we see how both shows rely on and reproduce what Berlant calls infantile citizenship: “an ideal type of patriotic personhood in America [that] … inhabits many patriotic pilgrimage narratives, […] [that carries with it a] historical specificity to the iconicity of the current modal citizen, the child or youth on whose behalf national struggles are being waged” (21). The children featured in these episodes, particularly those who are featured in *HSUSA*, innocently acquiescing to the vigilance of the airport security check point; perform their naïve agency and docile patriotism, re-constructing the image of citizenry in need of protection. This trope then is useful in
order to make visible and decipherable those who threaten the unquestioning infantile citizen.

Within this imaginary of the innocent nation, Nora can be vulgarly caricatured into “Swiss Miss” and constructed as threatening to and ultimately excludable and removable from the U.S. “We’re looking for anything that doesn’t look like it belongs”, comments the mail inspector in the scene that immediately follows the inspection of Nora’s suitcase.

According to Mary Douglas and her work on cross-cultural rituals of contact and avoidance, *Purity and Danger*, what is considered ‘dirty’ is always open to cultural interpretation, and is better understood as “matter out of place”. Furthermore, Douglas observes that the process of creating imagined communities, or groups, involves, among other things, projecting the purity of one group against the impurity of another. That which is considered contaminated, dangerous or taboo is viewed as separate or belonging outside of the group. Anna Meigs expands upon Douglas’s work, describing “matter out of place”, particularly contaminants as “polluting substances are those that attempt uninvited contacts between bodies” (Hill 793).

Nowhere is the fear of contamination, or dilution of cultural purity, to use Leo Chávez’s term, more palpable than the photograph in McGivney that is tagged: “Victoria’s Dirty Secret”. This 4” x 5” of a white pair of panties punctured through the leg, or crotch, by a pink-colored saguaro has a caption that reads: “[m]igrants often drape discarded underwear from saguaros in a rite of passage marking their arrival in the U.S.” (44). McGivney’s title does a variety of constitutive and representational work, among
which is the construction of a female migrant as vulgar and polluting “matter out of place”. Ironically, McGivney seems to express a fear of “ritual pollution” to use Douglas’ language, although used imprecisely in this case, in assuming that the undergarment is a marker of a migrant ritual.

In Hill’s study she finds that media treatments of the U.S.-Mexico border in the mid-nineties conjured up a set of familiar images in the public imaginary: that of the self-soiling Mexican, and another of pollution, as recalled by the “Love Canal”. Hill finds the mediatc representation of the Mexico’s northern border was one that focused on “‘squalid living conditions,’ ‘putrid open sewers,’ ‘reeking contaminated canals,’” ‘squatter camps,’ ‘shanty towns,’ and even the ‘filth, unsafe plants’ that characterize the Mexican side of the border always seemed poised to spill over onto the U.S. side, following the logic that ‘pollution knows no boundaries” (788). These images were overlapped with the other “contaminant” that could easily spill over the border: migrants—‘linking migrants to environmental pollution’(790) and simultaneously re-creating the stereotype of a “dirty Mexican” through a chain of signification that is created by repetitively linking together images and descriptions of waste, garbage, impurities, women’s undergarments, Mexican women and Mexican men.22

Hill cites Julia Kristeva, who describes how associating particular groups of people with “polluting substances” works to constitute these imagined others as less-civilized than other counterparts. In the case of Hill, she extends Kristeva to argue that constructing Mexican migrants as polluting others serves to cast them as less-civilized than their U.S. neighbors:

Like Douglas, Julia Kristeva argued that antipathy toward human effluvia (including fecal matter, blood, and mucous) stems not so much from concerns about hygiene as from fear of fundamental boundary transgression—the failure to distinguish between the subject and object, or the self and its others. (Hill 793)

The “Victoria’s Dirty Secret” photograph of the underwear on the saguaro, in concert with its title and tag, indexes the personal contact that Kristeva describes as “allowing a porosity of the boundaries of the body” (Hill 793). According to Kristeva these images evoke fears of “polluting Mexicans” by representing them as simultaneously more and less natural. Kristeva argues that these representations rely on and reproduce the trope of civilization versus barbarism.

They are closer to nature (as they are less civilized), but they are distant from their basic human nature. In failing to recognize the subject/object or the self/surrounding boundaries, Mexican subjects pollute the environment. In so doing, they spread matter that threatens to breach the bodily boundary of American subjects who share the border environment (Hill 793).
The “Victoria’s Dirty Secret” photograph, in the context of the article, and in large part as a stand-alone image with its title and descriptor, imagine and produce a Mexican female migrant that simultaneously vulgar, threatening and the less-civilized foil against whom the U.S. nationals, as embodied by the authorized backpackers and security forces are imagined. The “civilizing” and frontier-forging project that McGivney suggests later in the article in which the Organ Pipe can be rescued through the presence of backpackers, relies upon the phantasmal image of “Victoria” in order to sustain itself.

She, “Victoria,” is also constructed as doubly threatening wherein the presence of her pollution is coupled with her invisibility. This construction of an imagined risk allows Backpacker to become one of the participatory sites for the justification of what Benjamin Muller refers to as the emerging biometric state and security dispositif that “is defined by the prevalence of virtual borders and reliance on biometric identifiers such as passports, trusted-traveler programmes and national ID cards, as well as the forms of social sorting that accompany these maneuvers” (2008 199). As Muller argues popular culture produces some of the key sites through which receptivity for emerging attempts to “‘govern through risk’” is fostered (199).

In the next chapter, I will treat more directly and in-depth how popular visual culture, in particular how Border Wars, fosters receptivity for, and displays, the emerging biometric security regime. In this chapter, I will continue to concentrate on how these outdoor magazines craft and re-stage the requisite scenarios that promote the acceptance and adoption of the militarized biometric security dispositif that is constituted and performed in Border Wars.
In the case of “Victoria’s Dirty Secret”, we see how a found undergarment is framed to signify vulgarized uncivilized migrant, whose passage into the United States is imagined as both undetected and marked by pollution. Furthermore, the pink tone of this and the other photographs also works to connote the borderlands as a feminized frontier, in need of patriarchal protection. The article only features photographs of the men that work in the OPCNM, even though we are told that the author’s guide is Ami Pate. On one level, these lawmen that are framed in this pink frontier come to represent what the white colonizers that fear the violation of their daughters by colonized others. These are stock characters in the frontier scenario.

As Coco Fusco describes her and Guillermo Gomez-Peña’s intervention into the colonial unconscious of American society in their “Couple in the Cage” performance, “In order to justify genocide, enslavement, and the seizure of lands, a ‘naturalized’ splitting of humanity along racial lines had to be established” (47). As Fusco notes, even wherein the fear of miscegenation is no longer a dominant element of this public imaginary and discourse, she argues that the reactions to “The Couple in the Cage” suggest that “The stereotypes about nonwhite people that were continuously reinforced by the ethnographic displays [in the nineteenth century] are still alive in high culture and the mass media. Imbedded in the unconscious, these images form the basis of the fears, desires, and fantasies about the cultural Other” (48).

Similarly, I find that the colonial scenario which Fusco and Gómez-Peña “disrupt”, as Taylor argues (68), works to critique many of the tropes and imaginations

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23 Border Wars also tends to avoid featuring female ICE agents on active desert patrols, although viewers can catch glances of them from time to time.
that are uncritically re-staged in the explorer texts studied here. As Homi Bhabha argues in his essay “The Other Question” colonialist discourse relies upon the production of stereotyping through the marking of a racialized other. However, as Bhabha writes:

Stereotyping is not the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices. It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of; ‘official’ and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse. (81-82)

If, as Bhabha signals, the colonial stereotype functions as both phobia and fetish, then our task is to identify how and if the stereotypes visualized here function in the same way. By vulgarizing the image of the migrants, McGivney indexes them as threatening and impure which ultimately works to construct these migrants as excludable from that which is to be protected and or admitted entrance. What McGivney seems to project however is also a fetishization of the fear and excitement, the “frontier adventure” can provide hikers, perhaps even offering contact with these dangerous elements.

McGivney also uses the photograph titled “Migrant or Drug Smuggler?” to further separate and define presumed Mexican border crossers from authorized backpackers. In the only photo of a non-employee of the U.S. Nation-State, McGivney projects the doubtful nativist gaze on to the hiker encountered, traversing her space. The title also questions the young man’s identity and indexes him as either a representative of the drug traffic between the two countries, or as an unauthorized border crosser. The
The first thing I notice is the purple hickey. Then the expensive sneakers, the new blue jeans—and the large, L-shaped bulge in his front pocket. The young man we’ve encountered hiking south near Sweetwater Pass looks like a suburban teenager, complete with pimples, peach fuzz, and a disaffected slouch. But the bulge gives him away. It’s a gun. He’s almost certainly a drug smuggler—a ‘backpacker’ in law enforcement lingo—who’s just dropped off a load of pot. (48)

While McGivney fails to clarify why, or under what conditions, this presumably dangerous criminal allowed her to take his picture, she simultaneously questions and determines his identity through her reading of his body. The photographer Howe also destabilizes the young man through the layout of the shot: he is positioned at a 45-degree angle in the frame, and the photo is distorted so as to make the ground look as if it is sloping away under the hiker’s feet—making it look like the hiking ‘drug-smuggler’ is about to fall forward.

In contrast, the photos of the park ranger Bo Stone and Border Patrol agent Glen Payne on the previous pages have stable identities, as evidenced in the use of their names, uniforms, and upright placement in the frames and on the pages. The binary between these men can be further appreciated when we learn that the park rangers also refer to themselves as “‘Danger Rangers’—a new breed of park police skilled with weapons, not
nature talks” (45). While we are either told and/or shown that the park rangers and Border Patrol agents featured in the McGivney article are also armed, and while the author is in fact hiking in Arizona, a state with some of the most lenient gun laws in the U.S., she determines that this young (un)-identified armed hiker is “matter out of place”: reading him as a gun-toting drug smuggler who is threatening to the other “authorized” armed men, and as a polluting migrant that is threatening to the natural environment of the park, i.e., “Migrant or Drug Smuggler?”. In this light, it does not really matter that McGivney sort out which kind of threat this young man represents, because in the end, to her, as evidenced in the description, migrants, drug smugglers, and young brown hikers for that matter, are one in the same, and therefore unnecessary to separate. Also, by marking him in the photo tag as “part of the machine” McGivney not only indexes him as a signifier for a much broader signified, but also as representative of the man suspected of killing park ranger Kris Eggle, Panfilo Murillo Aguilá, to whom the article refers as El Zarco.

From the young man’s hickey-marked body that carries both evidence of sexual acts and potential to kill, to the assumed woman of “Victoria’s Dirty Secret” and her underwear, which are read as indicative of her snub towards the U.S., and ultimately of her deviant sexualized agency, McGivney’s interpretations of what she can both see, and imagine, work to identify for readers what she determines are threatening markers. Her reading and description also attempt to separate these imagined and perceived migrants from the “authorized backpackers” and security agents, i.e. U.S. citizens, who are deemed threatened and, therefore, protectable.

We also see here how these border crossers fit into the roles of two of the stock
characters in the frontier scenario: the bandit and his female equivalent: the prostitute. As Fojas notes in her study of Hollywood border films, Charles Ramírez Berg finds the Hollywood bandit to have evolved from the character of the greaser:

Like the greaser, the bandit represents the darker urges repressed in civilized society and is perceived as a psychopath who lacks a moral compass or an empathic connection to others. His bad behavior is evident in his physical composition—the aesthetic counterpart to his irrational violence, dishonesty, and illegal dealings is an unkempt appearance marked by greasy hair and missing teeth. (Fojas 6)

While McGivney does not have the power of a film director, equipped with make-up artists, actors and wardrobe so as to artfully craft the menacing figures of the borderlands, she relies on her descriptive power, as well as the power of her photographer, to tell readers how she perceives the people she either encounters or imagines.

These frontier scenarios signal and rely upon anxieties that could be described by what Octave Mannoni refers to as the “Prospero Complex”. In *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, Mannoni describes this complex as the colonial patriarch’s fear of the violation of his daughter. In the aforementioned representations: “Victoria’s Dirty Secret”, “Nora”, “the hickey-marked smuggler”, as contrasted with the little children or the hikers, and security agents, the gendered, sexualized and racialized anxieties that colonial discourses comprise and contain are re-performed and re-deployed, effectively producing frontier scenarios in these explorer texts.

As Fojas finds of the characters in the Western films, bandits and prostitutes are
used so as to demand “moral retribution from the Anglo characters” (6). The women in these scenarios that are depicted as “sexually promiscuous and loose” are contrasted against the figure of the “civilized Anglo-American wom[an]” (6). In the case of Backpacker magazine, McGivney and her guide Ami Pate are the women that cannot tolerate the behavior and refuse they encounter on their journey. Fojas cites Rosa Linda Fregoso who notes that these frontier scenarios, seen in Western films, tend to inscribe the border on the bodies of “Mexicanas, Tejanas, and Califorinas” ‘coding them as degenerates when contrasted with the civilized Anglos’ (6). As Fojas finds: “The natives of the Southwest were depicted as inferior and as harlots and bandits, often to justify colonial expansion and the expropriation of their land and property through war and theft” (6). Here we see how this scenario is re-staged to do similar work, in this case, to signal to whom the borderlands nature belongs and how it is to be used24.

Furthermore, I find that these examples allow us to witness not only how popular visual discourse works to construct and exclude a deviant Other, but to also simultaneously imagine and discipline a U.S. national subject towards behaviors of sanctioned purity and surveilled deviance. In keeping with Bhabha’s assessment of colonial discourse, the production of the Other works in the service of defining and disciplining the colonial subject. Here we see how these explorer texts participate in the project of constituting and pitting one form of subjecthood against another—in this case that of the threatening migrant against that of the U.S. Citizen. In the case of the

24 In the case of Border Wars, studied in the next chapter, we will see how the frontier scenario is re-deployed to do the more direct work of justifying military intervention.
frontier scenario, explorers must be authorized, as they ultimately continue to do the work of the neoliberal imperial state.

In this way, the explorer texts studied in this and the next chapter, participate in and constitute the public political discourse that works to identify and separate U.S. citizens from threatening others, i.e. terrorists and potential terrorists. To restate however, this project is double sided, in that the production of enemies and threats also works to discipline the citizen. I find that the disciplinary work performed by the examples of purity and vulgarity analyzed here form part of the larger disciplinary project that Jasbir Puar examines in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Puar argues that homonationalism: the “collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national rhetorics of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects themselves” works in the service of the vilification of Muslims wherein “the Orientalist invocation of the terrorist is one discursive tactic that disaggregates U.S. national gays and queers from racial and sexual others” (39). Some of the salient and key parallels between Puar’s findings and my own are the production and deployment of notions of deviancy so as to conduce citizens towards sanctioned behaviors.

As Puar writes,

> [s]exual deviancy is linked to the process of discerning, othering, and quarantining terrorist bodies, but these racially and sexually perverse figures also labor in the service of disciplining and normalizing subjects worthy of rehabilitation away from these bodies, in other words, signaling and enforcing the mandatory terms of patriotism. In this double
deployment, the emasculated terrorist is not merely an other, but also a barometer of ab/normality involved in disciplinary apparatuses. (38)

In the case of Puar’s “double deployment” the disciplined homonational is pitted against the emasculated terrorist. Puar argues, along Foucauldian lines of biopolitics, that the former is domesticated and turned in toward the management of its life, rendering the latter of the two, removable and ultimately “turned out towards death”. These biopolitical lines are also crucial elements in the production of threatening migrants, and as Benjamin Muller argues, in the production of the biometric state that manages citizens and migrants so as to determine which ones need to be surveilled and which others can be detained. Here we see in these examples we see how sites of popular culture work to visualize some of the parameters that are used within the ever-increasing security dispositif. In these cases, they tend to do not only the constitutive work of imagining citizens and enemies but also, particularly through the construction of threats, further advocating for greater militarization and “foster[ing] receptivity for emerging attempts to govern through risk” (“Securing” 200).

The “perverse bodies” captured, imagined and produced by McGivney demonstrate how the process of constructing deviant and excludable Others occurs not only in the performed actions of the State, but also in disparate, and perhaps unexpected places, yet necessary places. When these seemingly small or insignificant imaginations, like those of Backpacker magazine, are considered in combination or cacophonous concert with their myriad repetitions, we can see how they become sites of constitutive violence and participate in larger political projects.
As Eithne Luibhéid finds in her study of the U.S. immigration service’s history of exclusion based on categories of sexual difference, the construction of aberrant sexualized Others works, in the first instance, to produce a dominant, yet unmarked other, whose sexuality is disciplined and normativized. “…lesbian and gay exclusion is less the history of a minor group than of self-constituting actions by the powerful who then erase the traces of their own production while stigmatizing and policing others” (ix). If sorting and separating different “kinds” of migrants in order to better define “the citizen” is a function of U.S. statecraft and desire, then in the examples studied here we see how these sites of popular visual culture help perform the work of the state. Wherein Luibhéid finds the ‘U.S. immigration control apparatus to be a key site for the production, reproduction and regulation of sexual categories, norms and identities with relations of inequalities’, here it becomes apparent that popular visual culture not only serves as a site of this regulation, but works as an arm of the immigration control and citizen regulating apparatus (X).

Luibhéid and Puar’s studies both respond to the need to investigate the gendered and racialized norms that regulate and drive state actions. As Puar asks, “[w]hat are the heteronormative assumptions still binding fields and disciplines of security and surveillance analyses, peace and conflict studies, terrorism research, public policy, transnational finance networks, human rights and human security blueprints, and international peacekeeping organizations such as the United Nations?” (xiii). Following Puar, we can see in McGivney and HSUSA, how the construction of imagined innocent U.S. citizens as women and children posited alongside the multiple images of men
actively protecting the nation, and also against those of threatening others, work together to reproduce particular heteronormative assumptions about protectors versus protectees and are driven by desires for sexual discipline of the imagined U.S. citizen, as well as the U.S. immigrant.

By framing and reading a pair of women’s underwear, found in an area known to be frequented by migrants, as rudely discarded trash, McGivney projects a desire to imagine the migrant as “excludable based on ground of immorality”. As Luibhéid demonstrates, U.S. immigration laws since 1895 have consistently regulated and denied admission to women migrants based on grounds of “morality”, granting permission to “preferred” women such as “wives” while excluding lesbians and prostitutes. McGivney’s construction of vulgarity on the part of the imagined migrant also necessarily elides both the popular belief about the existence of “Rape Trees” as well the officially documented cases of sexual violence against migrants along the U.S.-Mexico border.

In contrast to the McGivney narrative that displayed underwear are markers of rites of passage, intentionally displayed by female migrants upon arrival in the U.S., the other predominant narrative that has emerged around the finding of displayed women’s undergarments on trees and cacti in the U.S. Mexico borderlands is that women’s they are “suspected monuments to the systematic assault of migrating women by their well-paid coyotes (guides)” otherwise known as rape trees, as described by Taylor Owen Ramsey. However, I find that both of these narratives tend to ventriloquize an imagined migrant,
and often use the presence-absence of the female migrant and her violation to further advocate for militarization of the borderlands.

The most dominant reading of the underwear on desert flora is that of the rape tree and this interpretation is similarly described and visualized across a variety of sources: Cochise County Sherriff Larry Dever’s report to the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on “Federal Strategies to End Border Violence”; Representative Ted Poe’s statement on the congressional record; Latina.com; Tim Vanderpool’s “Price of Admission” article in the Tucson Weekly, Former Minutemen Civil Defense member, and now convicted felon, Shawna Forde’s YouTube video “Shawna Explains the Rape Tree”, and the television show Weeds—all provide similar interpretations and explanations of rape trees. For example, Mariela Rosario of Latina.com defines rape trees as: places where cartel members and coyotes rape female border crossers and hang their clothes, specifically undergarments, to mark their conquest. According to these sources, like Latinalista: “Rape trees prove Mexican violence has crossed the border and there are women who need justice”.

In her on-line paper “Feeding the U.S. Labor Market: Rape Trees and the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands” Taylor Owen Ramsey, attributes the definition of a “Rape Tree” to these same sources listed above, citing Ted Poe and Larry Dever’s testimonies. The Poe and Dever testimonies, which rely on statistics that I am unable to substantiate, are used repeatedly in sources that discuss rape trees. Owen Ramsey also agrees when she writes “Neither official report of the trees points to any investigation confirming sexual violence or any confirmed meaning of the trees beyond speculation”. Nonetheless, while Owen
Ramsey also recognizes the impossible nature of verifying the full etymology of these so-called rape trees, she nonetheless takes this definition as a starting point to form her arguments about the representational and constitutive work that these trees do in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, arguing that whether the trees are or are not the sites of sexual violence, the nevertheless serve as “symbolic representation[s] of a distinct power discourse at work.” Owen Ramsey also argues that the rape tree figures as an “apparatus of security”, drawing on Foucault to highlight how their symbolic presence compliments the already ongoing state project that as Owen Ramsey describes it, “functionally seeks to both include and exclude bodies based on a combined logic of sexual normativity and capitalist needs”. In this way, Owen Ramsey finds that the rape tree serves to compliment the already in progress vigilance and sorting that the Border Patrol attempt to perform.

However, I argue that it is key to study the sites in which these discourses containing the definitions of rape trees emerge, and their power, as opposed to undertaking yet another analysis of the displayed undergarments themselves. I do not make these arguments because of the lack of formal proof for the origins of rape trees, nor do I deny in any way that acts of gender violence occur in the borderlands. Rather, it is due to the frightening similarities that I find between these sites of visual discourses and the gender violence that they claim to denounce that I argue that the visual narratives themselves constitute sites of deployment of the uneven power relations and gender violence at work in the U.S. – Mexico borderlands.

While McGivney’s vulgarized representation of the imagined migrant fails to
recognize the possible context of gender violence and/or possibility that these underwear on this saguaro constitute a “rape tree”, my investigation of the sources listed above has lead me to discover that most of the discussions about rape trees also form parts of larger projects that are in the business of “excluding migrants on grounds of immorality” (Luibhéid) and/or promoting neoimperial militarization of the border and/or civilian vigilante activism.

I also find that many of the websites that include these discussions and definitions of rape trees exist within what Willie Costley refers to as a “disintermediated mediascape”: a network of sites, in this case websites, online articles and videos, that are all linked together though a set of fluid hyperlinks. In his study, Costley cites Andrew Shapiro’s *The Control Revolution: How the Internet is Putting Individuals in Charge and Changing the World We Know*, arguing that the consequence of what Shapiro calls “disintermediation,” or the elimination of filters such as reliable sources and fact checkers (the cornerstones of traditional, responsible journalism) “is the personalization of internet and the elimination of cognitive dissonance” (Costley). For example, Sherriff Dever and Representative Ted Poe’s testimonies are used as proof for the existence and significance of rape trees and border violence across numerous websites and articles that ultimately advocate for further militarization of the border. Given that these

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25 In his study of anti-immigrant and vigilante websites, "Bordering the Digital Debate: The Anti-Immigrant New Mediascape" Costley argues that the reflexivity of the network of websites can lead to the formation of a new episteme, or “field of scientificity” in which anti-immigrant assertions gain “truth” by sustaining themselves on one another in what he refers to as a “mediascape”. Costley arrives at his definition of a “mediascape” via Foucault's notion of scientificity. “My use of the term "mediascape" has more in common with Foucault’s episteme, because I refer to the internet's power to generate what Foucault called a "field of scientificity" (which he discusses in *The Order of Things*); or a set of discourses that determine what can be considered true or false” (Costley).
representatives of the State make their statements in government testimonies lends them yet another level of perceived veracity, or scientificity. For example, Examiner.com uses their statements, while also noting disruptions to the natural environment: “In recent years, Arizona’s Pinal and Cochise Counties have seen an expanding number of these barbaric symbols dotting the once pristine landscape. Notably, the supposed evidence of sexual violence is used to contrast invasive barbaric practices against an untouched natural environment.

Overall, I conclude that in the case of representations of rape trees, the majority of websites and online articles that define and discuss them make claims that I was unable to substantiate and are reflexive elements in a circuitous distermediated mediascape, linking to and/or relying on one another as sources of veracity. Within this circuitous distermediated mediascape, these sites share a troubling set of characteristics, especially in the ways in which they address, or fail to address, gender violence in the borderlands.

Similar definitions of rape trees can be found on the Weeds episode (S4:E8) in

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26 For example, Sherriff Dever and Ted Poe’s testimonies are used as proof for the existence and significance of rape trees and border violence across numerous websites and articles that ultimately advocate for further militarization of the border. For example, Examiner.com’s: “Evidence of Massive Numbers of Rapes being Committed along the U.S.-Mexico Border”, published on January 29th, 2012 uses the statements, while also noting disruptions to the natural environment: “In recent years, Arizona’s Pinal and Cochise Counties have seen an expanding number of these barbaric symbols dotting the once pristine landscape. On March 1, 2006, Cochise County Sheriff Larry Dever told a Senate subcommittee: “Smuggling routes are often marked with ‘rape trees’—women’s under garments hung on tree limbs where a raped occurred, warning everyone of the failure to cooperate with the coyotes who prey on them.” On June 7, 2006, Rep. Ted Poe (R-Texas) read the following report into the Congressional Record: “Ripped from the bodies of unwilling women, undergarments cling to branches of a tree just a few feet from the lawless U.S.-Mexico border, dozens of pairs of underwear thrown there by rapists More than 70 percent of their rapes, murders and child sex crimes are against Americans. One expert who studies sex crimes says about a hundred illegal sex offenders cross the border every day, leaving thousands of victims every year. Rape trees are a warning to illegals not to talk. They should be a warning to Americans as well, to shout out against illegal entry and human smuggling. And that’s just the way it is.” (my emphasis, Examiner.com).
which Andy attempts to be a compassionate coyote as well as on YouTube videos of Shawna Forde. How might a topic as horrifying as rape serve both *Weeds* and Shawna Forde? Curiously both rape tree narratives posit a vulgar and violent other, the coyote-rapist, as well as a silent victim in need of rescue. In the case of Forde, who was convicted for murders of nine year old Brisenia Flores and her father, as well as the attempted murder of Brisenia’s mother, the video has been used as part of a website that sought to defend the innocence and vigilante actions of Forde “Justice for Shawna Forde”. In Forde’s “explanation of the rape tree” the homemade video captures Forde explaining the significance of the underwear on the tree, as well as her commentary in which claims to U.S. exceptionalism are not denied but actively promoted, wherein she reminds her viewers that “we’re not a third-world country” ultimately advocating for military action on the border.

In the *Weeds* example, Andy accidentally mistakes, what his migrant clients tell him is a rape tree, for evidence “that someone had a fiesta”. He then proceeds to move his cadre of migrants to a place that “isn’t so rapey”. The *Weeds* episode, similar to the congressional and senatorial testimonies of Congressman Poe and Sheriff Dever, and like the explorer magazines, reactivates a rescue narrative that serves to forward a disavowed imperial project, positing the U.S. subject, (embodied in Andy, Border Patrol agents, or park rangers) as the ultimate arbiter of human rights, that is induced to protect these rights, given the dangers that he has seen, or more specifically, been told exist.

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27 See the “Shawna explains the Rape Tree” video on YouTube.
28 In this season of *Weeds*, the protagonist, Nancy Botwin, the suburban widow turned pot dealer, also confronts the “human cost” of drug smuggling when she learns the drug tunnel that she helps cover is being
As Inderpal Grewal signals in *Transnational America* (2005), the transnational imperial project relies on culture for its re-production: in which old imperial theories are re-activated in new discursive formations. As Grewal writes, the US routinely positions itself as “the site for authoritative condemnation” of human rights abuses elsewhere, ignoring such abuses within its borders. Grewal also argues that U.S. neoimperial feminism, such as that which was activated prior to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, envisions an Other in need of rescue.

In the case of the sites that interpret and discuss “rape trees”, and the *Backpacker* interpretation of the underwear, I find that the majority do so not to promote what Schmidt Camacho calls the strengthening of the institutions that protect and provide the “substance of citizenship: access to goods and services, justice, security and political representation” (“Cuidadana X” 296) but rather, advocate for further militarization of the borderlands, and increases in neoliberal statecraft. Furthermore, the frontier discourse reproduces and relies upon notions of neoimperialism. Amy Kaplan (“Violent Belongings”) argues that U.S. neoimperial discourses attempt to deny claims to imperialism by creating the impression that all violences of the state are in some moral, cultural or political fashion, anything but the violence of empire, but rather defensive or preemptive responses against threats. Wherein the frontier scenario requires dangerous others in need of civilizing corrections, we see in these representations how this scenario used to smuggle what appear to be innocent women from Eastern Europe. Nancy is also constructed as wanting to be innocent. She desires that the tunnel function to run drugs, but she is unable to tolerate that it be used for slavery and/or human smuggling.

29 The exception to the exception here are the militant vigilante groups whose websites and videos directly advocate for militarized protection of the empire.
is restaged and in so doing works to invite greater state presence.

While McGivney writes extensively about how difficult it is for her to have to see all of the “trash” in the OPCNM, nonetheless she is quick to dismiss evidence that much of the environmental damage in the monument is caused by the Border Patrol, as well as omit altogether the larger social implications of all of this migrant “trash”. As Hill would argue, McGivney dismisses the damages caused by the Border Patrol, because environmental concern is only a stand-in for concern about “illegal immigration.” However, in this case, it is more precise to argue that McGivney’s dismissal of the Border Patrol’s role in environmental destruction signals deeper preoccupations about who specifically is allowed to use, and ultimately protect or trash, the wild places along the U.S.-Mexico border:

Indeed, I’ll later learn that agents drag tires behind trucks to create roads, sometimes crossing into designated wilderness. / But for now, my attention is drawn to khaki pants Pate has discovered under a mesquite tree. ‘Washwear!’ she exclaims, using border slang for discarded clothing. She and Barns debate whether a coworker […] would want them.

Apparently not; Pate flings them back in the wash. / I swallow hard at the sight of a park employee hucking trash in a wilderness, but I soon see Pate’s and Barns’s bottom line. They can’t tolerate clothing draped on desert plants. (47-48)

Apparently to trace how the Border Patrol contributes to the environmental destruction of the OPCNM is much less sexy than focusing on littering migrants for McGivney. To do
so would break with the author’s overall message that argues that the OPCNM is threatened by deviant migrants and needs to be protected by “authorized backpackers” and Border Patrol agents.

In spite of the absence of reflections on sexual violence, and the larger humanitarian crisis that migrant refuse might signify, McGivney nevertheless, reproduces, via ventriloquism of the imagined migrant, the ‘violent theft of agency’ (to use Alicia Schmidt Camacho’s terminology) that is characteristic of sexual violence in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as well as of the representations of sexual violence. Therefore, from McGivney’s construction of the vulgar migrant in *Backpacker*, and what I originally perceived to be her “miss/dismissal” of rape trees, to what I have found to be the discourses that actually define and utilize the trope of rape trees, I find that both interpretations of the hanging undergarments ultimately participate in the ongoing and multifarious process of producing dispensable, threatening and disposable non-citizens.

As Schmidt-Camacho (“Cuidadana X”) signals, the sexual violence in the borderlands, of which *feminicidio* (in greatest concentration in Ciudad Juarez) and migrant rape (throughout the borderlands) are exemplary, involves the simultaneous silencing and re-signifying of victims. Along this violent continuum, the vulgarization of victims, produced in visual culture, participates in the process that re-inscribes while, ultimately silencing and disappearing migrants and other subalterns in the borderlands. The ways in which McGivney maligns the imagined female migrant in her article are disturbingly similar to the ways in which the victims of *feminicidio* in Ciudad Juarez have
been imagined by State officials and popular media.\textsuperscript{30}

In the case of the visual vulgarization of real and imagined migrants studied here, I find that these representations also do the work of the state wherein they work to legitimate particular women’s exclusion from both the space of the nation, but also, the protections, real or perceived, of the state. Wherein “Victoria” comes to represent other female migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, by portraying her as a vulgar threat, McGivney constructs the migrant as threatening, simultaneously advocating for further militarization, so as to protect from such threats, and rendering the imagined female migrant unworthy of protections.

I place these representations from visual culture within the violent continuum of \textit{Feminicidio} in Ciudad Juarez and gender based sexual violence against migrants in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, while recognizing distinctions between the forms of violence, because, as Schmidt-Camacho argues in her 2005 article “Ciudadana X: Gender Violence and the Denationalization of Women’s Rights in Ciudad Juárez, México”, both forms of violence bear the markers of a larger systematic violence that is perpetrated against subalterns via the political and economic interstices that are at work and often exacerbated in the borderlands. While gender violence is a worldwide phenomenon and is not particular to borderlands, there are particular features of the political economy of the

\textsuperscript{30} Many victims of \textit{feminicidio} have been described as having lived \textit{la doble vida}, i.e. having worked as prostitutes, thereby rendering them ultimately killable, torturable and disappearable. Citing María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba (2003) and Melissa Wright (2003), Schmidt-Camacho (2005) highlights how imaginations of victims of \textit{feminicidio} as prostitutes not only attempt to excuse state failures to protect victims and ultimately prosecute perpetrators of \textit{feminicidio}, furthermore, “[t]he moral discourse linking obreras and prostitutes both masks the state’s interest in sexualizing female labor and legitimates subaltern women’s exclusion from the protected sphere of citizenship” (266).
U.S.-Mexico borderlands, that is to say, on both sides of the border, that contribute to and foster gender violence, and the production of “dispensable and exploitable noncitizens” particularly in so far as the borderlands is a space that becomes a place where notions of citizenship and national belonging are acutely experimented with and experienced.

While a full discussion of the feminicidios of Ciudad Juárez is beyond the scope of this chapter, given the chapter’s particular focus on representations of the U.S.-Mexico border from the U.S. perspective, and as feminicidio will also be addressed in the following chapters, it is however necessary to highlight the shared and similar features between the gender violence in Ciudad Juárez and that which is used against migrant bodies along the U.S. southern border, precisely because they share in characteristics that are either borne of or thrive in neoliberal environments, with their requisite militaristic protections.

The term feminicidio was coined to denounce and describe the systematic killing of girls and women, based particularly on their gender. The gender violence faced by female migrants crossing the U.S. southern border shares with feminicidio ‘the deliberate and systematic deprivation of poor women’s most basic rights to personal security and freedom of movement’. Furthermore, migrant rape is yet another outcome of what Schmidt-Camacho’s describes as “the feminization of dispensable noncitizens, seen in its most brutal form in the torture and “murder of subaltern Mexican girls and women in the

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31 It is important to note how heteronorms also entrap most understandings, or lack thereof, of sexualized gender violence in the U.S. southern borderlands. There is both an assumption of sexual assault victims being women and a treatment of sexual assault against men as different, particularly as more “pervasive” or aberrant than that of violence against women. (For example in the documentary Life and Death on the Border, Current TV Vanguard documentary series: “even men are raped”, i.e. it is so dangerous that even men are raped…women being raped is somehow more of a norm.)

state of Chihuahua” (“Ciudadana X” 259). In the case of *Backpacker* magazine, the gender violence that is performed exists at the level of representation, but it nonetheless contributes to the construction of threatening and disposable migrants, as well as an environment in need of state protections.

Sylvanna Falcón argues that gender violence against migrants in the U.S. borderlands, is also not only a result of state impunity, but, in fact, is a tactic used as a weapon of war in the low intensity conflict that is the militarization of the U.S. southern border by official U.S. state actors. Falcón studies cases of reported sexual assault of migrants committed by U.S. security agents along the U.S. southern border. As Falcón notes, official statistics on sexual assault against migrants in the borderlands are non-existent, or difficult to verify. However, there are reports and testimonies that serve as indicators of both cultures and expectations of sexual violence as part of the migratory process, especially for female migrants.32 The studies that do exist, that rely on “hard data”, tend to deal with the reported cases of sexual assault committed by the employees of the U.S. nation-state, as evidenced in Falcón and Luibhéid. As Schmidt-Camacho describes it: “[w]ithin this context, law enforcement officers and armed criminal groups routinely subject Mexican women to deliberate acts of gender terror” (“Ciudadana X” 278). Falcón argues that the processes of militarized security along the southern U.S. border represents, particularly for agents of the state, a state of war. As Schmidt Camacho and Falcón suggest, this perceived and performed state of war allows and incites, rather

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than prevents, gender violence.

I find that McGivney’s construction of “Victoria’s Dirty Secret” shares with the acts of gender violence the participation in a process of systematic humiliation, shaming, and degradation of the imagined female migrant. One of the characteristics of *feminicidio*, aside from evidence of pre- and posthumous torture and mutilation is what Schmidt-Camacho (“Ciudadana X”) calls “the distinct imprint of the border as the contact zone mediating the violent processes of Mexico’s modernization and integration with the United States and global capitalism. In each case, the state announced its refusal to act by displacing the blame onto the victims” (275). McGivney ultimately participates in the militarization process by constructing representations that displace blame onto victims, by imagining, vulgarizing and ultimately silencing the migrant, excluding her from protections and turning her towards systematic susceptibility. Wherein gender violence on the U.S. side of the border can be attributed directly to state actors, it is both troubling and curious how the frontier scenario works to invite further militarization.

Within this continuum of violence framed by neoliberal militarism, from its popular imaginations to its brutal realizations, as Schmidt-Camacho signals (“Ciudadana X” “Become Illegal”) the subaltern existence of women, be they migrants to northern Mexico and/or migrants to the U.S, or poor residents of northern Mexican cities, exposes them “less [to] an opening for ‘new political subjects and new spatialities for politics’”, as Sassen (42) refers to it, and more to “an encounter with new forms of social violence and repression at the hands of both state and non-state actors” (“Ciudadana X” 260). Schmidt-Camacho refers to this condition as a “detachment of citizenship from the
nation-state”, and owes this re-alignment of rights to “transformations within the state have expanded its function for social control while simultaneously weakening those institutions that proved the substance of citizenship: access to goods and services, justice, security, and political representation” (“Ciudadana X” 260).

“It’s a Drug Battle Ground”: Crafting the Borderlands as the Frontline on the War on Drugs and the Border Crosser as Drug Smuggler

The popular visual discourses that construct Mexico as a source of pollution, and subsequently migrants as polluting, work in concert with similar nativist discourses that project an image of a criminalized migrant as threatening to the border environment and subsequently U.S. Nation and its citizens. The objects of visual culture studied in this chapter, and the second chapter as well, tend to collapse drug-smuggling border crossers with non-drug smuggling migrants, ultimately lumping together those who cross the border to deliver drugs to the U.S. and those who cross the border to escape violence, to find work, to return to work, to return to or join families already in the U.S., and/or any number of motivators.

McGivney and Bowden, as well as Clynes and Cahill in National Geographic Adventure, all project an image that the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is a dangerous place by indexing that such danger is produced, in large part, by the figure of the migrant/drug smuggler, or human smuggler. These figures are conflated and simultaneously contrasted with the threatened protectors of this space, over and over again.

In the Bowden article, most of the human traces signaled in the photographs on the U.S. side of the border are associated with the Border Patrol or other forms of
militarized security. These are indexed through images of border walls, traces of security agents, or of their technologies of vigilance. Combined with the images, and their descriptions, from south of the border, the corpus connotes a message that U.S. border security forces are the protectors of the U.S. people and economy, maintaining undesirable and threatening behavior and conditions such as poverty, drunkenness, unauthorized immigration and drug smuggling on the south side of the border. In order to more clearly project this separation, Bowden and his photographers project a more uniform and particularly more vacant image of the U.S. side of the border compared to the complex of images of Mexico. The images of the U.S. side of the border are of open spaces and landscapes, all delineated by the walls or panoptic structures of the Border Patrol.33

Within this imaginary it is important to note that the references to the Border Patrol and/or U.S. border security forces tend to portray an image of a space that is both in- and out-of-control. For example, the photo “Flagrant Foul” centers on a chain-link metal backstop that is typically used behind the catcher and home plate in baseball or softball. According to the description, this old rusty fence, shot at night and illuminated by the headlights of a vehicle, was once used for baseball but now serves to protect Border Patrol agents: “Before they put it up, would-be border crossers (or helpers attempting to create a diversion) would toss rocks over the wall in the direction of the agents; now officers park behind it and monitor the border in safety”. The photo not only

33 This comparison not only works to separate Mexico from the U.S in this imaginary, it also reveals that an article about “our wall”, i.e. the U.S. southern border walls, is always already an article about Mexico.
converts the agonistic baseball field into an agonistic battlefield, it also only highlights the dangers coming from Mexico into the U.S.

There are four nighttime photographs that accompany the Bowden article, three in the photo gallery and one as the cover photo of the online article. Each photograph features the lights of the vigilant Border Patrol, reminding readers/viewers that vision and invisibility are primary weapons in this “battle field”. The “Calexico, California” photo features a set of lights on a portable boom, illuminating what appears to be a dusty field. The caption tells us: “The grass is dying and the shade trees collapsing, but security lights are in full bloom on a former golf course now used for policing the border. Ironically, say some immigration experts, the increasing lockdown can backfire, frightening migrants from attempting the journey home and thus lengthening their stays in the U.S.” In spite of the focus on vigilance and the tools of the Border Patrol, the Bowden article/photo gallery does not feature any of the numerous high-tech surveillance devices that the U.S. border security agencies deploy in order to detect, observe and ultimately detain and remove border crossers. By excluding the high-tech arsenal and emphasizing the more low-tech “homemade” protections Bowden effectively portrays an image of the Border Patrol as simultaneously under threat and under-funded.

De Genova writes: “Mexican migration in particular has been rendered synonymous with the U.S. nation-state’s purported ‘loss of control’ of its borders and has supplied the preeminent pretext for what has in fact been a continuous intensification of increasingly militarized control” (Working the Boundaries 242). Following De Genova, I find that the excessive cooperation of the state agencies in the production of the televised
spectacles that are *Homeland Security USA* and *Border Wars*, as well as their willingness to provide interviews as seen in *Backpacker*, *National Geographic* and *National Geographic Adventure*, not only participates in Low Intensity Conflict, described more fully in the next chapter, through the promotion of civil and military interaction, but can also be attributed to these agencies desire to portray their actions as necessary and effective, and to thereby ensure current and future funding.

In *Border Games: The Policing of the U.S.-Mexico Divide*, Peter Andreas also indicates that this narrative of “loss of control” also “understates the degree to which the state has actually structured, conditioned, and even enabled (often unintentionally) clandestine border crossings, and overstates the degree to which the state has been able to control its borders in the past” (7) thereby obscuring degree to which and the state structures the very conditions that generate calls for more policing. Andreas highlights that by directing the public to focus on the “loss of control” narrative, the U.S. state is viewed as “reactive”, obscuring how the it has in fact actively induced and “shaped” the “location, routes, methods and organization” of actors in the clandestine transborder economy, namely human and drug trafficking organizations (8). Andreas’ central argument is that the formal border economy and its official security have a symbiotic relationship with the clandestine side of the border economy. As Andreas argues:

> state practices, rather than simply abstract ‘market forces,’ have been essential in creating Mexico’s competitive advantage as a major exporter of both illegal drugs and illegal labor to the U.S. market and in setting up
the political conditions for the sharp escalation of control efforts in recent years. (12)

Andreas not only highlights how the state actively creates the inter-legal space in which smuggling as a criminalized act exists, but more specifically argues that “not only do smugglers depend on state laws for their existence, but the enforcement of such laws often creates better organized and more skillful smuggling groups, sometime unintentionally (but predictably) turning disorganized into organized smuggling” (23). Andreas points directly to the states’ liberalizing practices as influential in the fomentation of the clandestine border economy wherein “market-based reforms” not only have displaced peasant farmers, in Mexico for example, but have “increased incentive[s] to choose an underground ‘exit option’ of becoming either illegal immigrants or producers of illegal drug crops” (23). Furthermore, Andreas argues that trade liberalization, like that exemplified by NAFTA, can facilitate smuggling through the use of cross-border commercial channels such as cargo transportation as well as ease money laundering via deregulated financial circuits.

Andreas signals that by focusing on controlling the flow of drugs and migrant labor, the state with the use of the media, is also able to distract from the “more complex and politically divisive challenge of dealing with the enormous domestic demand for both psychoactive drugs and cheap migrant labor” (8). Bowden and McGivney similarly produce representations that distract from the more complex and inhumane elements of the U.S. border and its militarization. As Andreas writes, even when border policing is not particularly effective or efficient, its ceremonial practice serves as a gesture that
reaffirms the importance of the border as a stage on which the state can perform its role in maintaining sovereignty. The cooperation of the state agencies in the production of the magazine articles studied here, and especially the televised security spectacles, clearly demonstrate the U.S. state’s desire to portray its actions as necessary and effective. They also demonstrate the authors’ desires to portray the borderlands as the staging ground for the frontier scenario in which U.S. agents can successfully, or at least necessarily, defend U.S. sovereignty. As Andreas argues, “‘successful’ border management depends on successful image management, […] the escalation of border policing has been less about deterring than about image crafting” (9).

Andreas argues that the state actively crafts the image of the U.S.-Mexico border as a dangerous “out of control” zone so that politicians and security agencies alike can simultaneously shape public opinion about the “problem” and then demonstrate their moral and political resolve through increased action. Andreas does not reflect as much on possibilities for resistant readings of this narrative but rather highlights the circuitous relationship between what he views as a public whose perception is highly influenced by the “images of the border which politicians, law enforcement agencies and the media project”, and the equal sensitivity of state agencies to public opinion and their responsive desires to assuage public concerns and appear effective (8).

In alignment with Andreas, De Genova (Working the Boundaries) claims, “it is precisely the border that provides the exemplary theater for staging the spectacle of ‘the illegal alien’ that the law produces. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, U.S. immigration enforcement efforts consistently and disproportionately targeted the U.S.-
Mexico border, sustaining a zone of relatively high tolerance within the interior\footnote{As demonstrated in my chapter on documentary films and migrant experiences, this “tolerance in the interior” has changed more recently.} (242). De Genova (\textit{Working the Boundaries}) also argues that: “The elusiveness of the law, and its relative invisibility in producing ‘illegality,’ requires this spectacle of enforcement at the border, which renders a radicalized Mexican/migrant ‘illegality’ visible, and lends it the commonsensical air of a natural fact” (242).

Tony Payan (\textit{Three Wars}) argues that increased surveillance along the U.S.-Mexico border, in the post-September security paradigm, increasingly imagines all border crossers as potential threats. “On this new border, everyone is suspect of wanting to harm America” (114). As we see in the examples above, these documents of visual culture function as sites of production of the “threats”, catching Mexican and migrant bodies in frames and marking them as dangerous. For example, the Bowden article employs photographs and their anchors to construct a visual binary between Mexican threats and U.S. security. The photo gallery includes many images of the U.S. border barrier structures. These images are accompanied by descriptions of, and captions about, the dangers confronted by Border Patrol agents, focusing on the dangers migrants pose to agents of the U.S. Nation-State, while excluding most references to dangers faced by migrants in the same spaces. Perhaps this is because the Mexican’s imagined by Bowden are either already fatally dangerous and/or marked for death.

The only photograph with visible people that accompanies the Bowden article is titled “Cold Comfort”. In a long shot, taken from inside Mexico looking north, three young men are captured walking down a street. To their left is the border fence of tall
bars and across the street to their right are the vertical staffs and sickles of multiple *Santa Muerte* statues, whose northward gazes also capture the passersby. According to Bowden’s description, the *Santa Muerte* is not an official Saint of the Catholic Church, but is a popular folkloric symbol among drug smugglers and coyotes. This image, especially when considered with the larger corpus of images studied in this chapter, essentializes and re-creates the place of young Mexican (or imagined to be Mexican) men in representations of the U.S.-Mexico border and its security: positioned, imagined and entrapped between crime and crime (crossing as an unauthorized migrant or crossing as a smuggler) or death and death (the dangers of crossing or the dangers of smuggling). In this photograph, these men become the embodied representations of the dangerous migrant/drug smuggler/coyote, or their victims via their photographic capture and identification by the author.

Furthermore the focus on imagined criminals and threats not only furthers the “loss of control” narrative and participates in the militarization of the border by advocating for increased securitization, it also obscures and elides cross-border communities, families and lives as well as their relationships to ever increasing security regimes. As Payan and Amanda Vasquez write in “The Costs of Homeland Security” very few representations of the U.S.-Mexico border feature

…images of efficient ports of entry that monitor hundreds of thousands of exchanges each day; daily exchanges of students and professors committed to creating curricula that intimately study border relations at
the sites of interaction; or intergovernmental cooperation arising from a binational commitment to improving health and the environment. (245)

Payan and Vasquez, who analyze the financial costs of increasing homeland security from U.S. government expenditures, to those of the Mexican vs. Canadian trucking industries, also emphasize the effects of increasing security and their related costs (financial and otherwise) to individuals and families that live cross border lives. To be sure, neither Bowden nor McGivney dedicate much if any representational space to the thousands of daily and weekly border crossers that live, work and belong to families on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, and never mind taking into account the ever increasing costs of security that these individuals incur. To make visible those who live (authorized and unauthorized) cross border lives would significantly undermine and complicate the dominant portrayal of the threatening “migrant/drug smuggler” and the “loss of control” narrative.

The Backpacker article furthers the condensation of the migrant-drug smuggler with the photograph “Jugs and Drugs”—a close up of a cracked black plastic bottle—refuse that is once again attributed to a threatening crosser. Along with the clever title, McGivney includes an anchor: “Marijuana-toting smugglers paint their water containers black so Border Police won’t spot the reflection” (49). While it is impossible for the author to establish to whom this bottle once belonged, she nonetheless directs viewers to imagine that it once belonged to a drug smuggler. While water bottles are painted black to avoid detection, it portrays those crossing the OPCNM as predominantly drug smugglers, and it also denies, through omission, that non-drug toting migrants also carry
black water bottles in order to better avoid detection by the ever increasing vigilance of U.S. Border Security forces. Furthermore, this photo caption also obscures, through its emphasis on drug smugglers, the nearly two thousand migrant deaths in this region that are directly attributed to exposure and dehydration.

While McGivney does mention in her “It is an Oven” section that “[i]n 2002, the death rate reached a record 145 in Arizona,” adding “[m]ore die here, where summer temperatures reach 120°F, than anywhere else along the border” (86), these facts are buried on page 86 at the back of the magazine, and nowhere visible near the “Jugs and Drugs” photo or in the “Migrant Highway” section that focuses on the environmental damage caused by unauthorized border crossers. Similarly, Bowden also recognizes migrant deaths, but these deaths, when compared to the overall content of the article, are discussed so as to make them yet another characteristic of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands: “The walls in southern California drove immigrants into the Arizona desert and, in some cases, to their deaths. We think of walls as statements of foreign policy, and we forget the intricate lives of the people we wall in and out” (Bowden 4). While Bowden includes this statement on border deaths, he ultimately focuses his article on the dangerous characteristics of the border, also seemingly forgetting to examine the lives of those affected by the militarization of the border. On the other hand, Bowden does demonstrate concern for those living north of the border, signaling how in the Post-NAFTA environment, Naco, Arizona has been “overrun” by immigrants: “…The local desert was

35 See for example the documentary film Life and Death on the Border in which the migrant and his smuggler both carry black water bottles.
36 See Humane Borders website that has maps of water beacons and migrant deaths recorded in Arizona: http://www.humaneborders.org/news/news4.html
stomped into a powder of dust. Naco residents found their homes broken into by
desperate migrants. Then came the wall in 1996, and the flow of people spread into the
high desert outside the town” (Bowden 2).

It is worth noting that Cahill’s article “Along the Devil’s Highway” in National
Geographic Adventure dedicates more writing and attention to migrant deaths, as well as
a very gruesome description of the physical process of dying from dehydration.
Therefore, these visual discussions and representations of the U.S. – Mexico border do not
altogether omit migrant deaths in the borderlands. However, Cahill, like the Bowden and
McGivney, focuses majority of his representational energies on the damages and
perceived dangers caused by imagined, and real border crossers. The myriad dangers
facing migrants, environmental and otherwise, are de-emphasized, not critically analyzed,
or are characterized as inherent features of the U.S. – Mexico border. Cahill goes so far
as to compare dangers affecting agents of the U.S. State or hikers to those of migrants’.37
For example, at the end of his article, which traces his journey along the “Devil’s
Highway” in Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, Cahill compares his survival of his
trip, in a vehicle, to that of migrants, on foot. Having found rocks arranged in the letters
“EV”, Cahill later learns that EV was possibly a message left by migrants meaning
“estamos vivos” (we’re alive). “‘We survived.’ It seemed a good enough epitaph for our
trip. We survived. So did the guys whose tracks we found at the Game Tanks. But the

37 Border Wars also includes in its first episode (S1:E1) a segment on migrant deaths, with an interview
with the Pima County Coroner in Tucson, Arizona and visuals of the cataloged remains of unidentified
border crossers.
Cabeza Prieta—a desert Ed Abbey loved enough, [...]—was in serious trouble. Whether it would survive was an open question” (8).

“*It’s an Occupied Territory*: Manifest Destiny in the Twenty-First Century

Ultimately, in order for the frontier scenario to be effective and intelligible, both the threat and the threatened have to be adequately constructed. Bowden and McGivney, as well as the other explorer magazine authors, utilize the natural environment of the borderlands to help them forge these representations. The combination of images of the pink flora and fauna in McGivney, and open picturesque U.S. landscapes in Bowden, as well as traces of migrants in both, all work to signal that which is matter out of place. Representing and visualizing “matter out of place” is essential for restaging the larger frontier discourse.

The frontier is an imaginary complex, and constructing the frontera as a frontier involves the creation of a space that in and of itself is not pure but rather can be purified, or at least improved and controlled through the presence of the colonizing frontiersman. The role of the Anglo-colonizer is central to the conceptualization of the frontier and the construction of the frontier in Anglo-American history involves constructing this space as both dangerous and beautiful.

In *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of the Right*, Anders Stephanson studies the development of manifest destiny within the popular imaginary of The United States. Stephanson signals how Thomas Jefferson and Frederick Jackson Turner, among others, played a key role in defining and promoting the notion of manifest destiny. The central actor in this construction is the “universal man,” who is converted
into the “frontiersman”. For Jefferson, “universal man” was a farmer who had been chosen through divine providence to carry out the mission of expansion, particularly that of capitalist agriculture, in the “chosen country” (Stephanson 21). However, in order to realize Jefferson’s “agrarian and radically anti-historical project”, as Stephanson refers to it, each generation would have to be given the “material means to stake out its own future, provided it would always be an agrarian and pastoral one”(22). Stephanson highlights that this agricultural expansion did not require extensive inputs and machinations from the state but did rely on the expansion of territory (22). For Jefferson, the U.S. was “the first space where man could really be free,” allowing for the

…liberation of universal man. It added to, in Jefferson’s apposite term, the ‘empire for liberty’. Yet to define expansion in such a manner was also to declare any potential enemy *an objective obstruction* to the course of natural freedom, in effect to call for elimination and liquidation. […] As Jefferson said with prophetic insight into the future empire, one must not tolerate any ‘blot or mixture on that surface’”. (Stephanson 22-23)

Stephanson demonstrates how genocide was incorporated and justified in the narrative of manifest destiny, concluding that between the Bible and “natural law” Jefferson and his followers determined that it was their duty to expand into and cultivate these new territories. Stephanson argues that in order for this narrative to justify the extermination of others, i.e. indigenous Americans, these Others were defined as “hunters and gatherers […] [whose] land was therefore empty, a ‘waste’ there for the taking” (Stephanson 25).
Not only are the actions and duties of this frontiersman described by Jefferson and Turner similarly reactivated, or encouraged, in the discourses of Bowden and McGivney, but these authors perform the necessary definitions and erasures of the denizens and landscape of the borderlands in order to construct the territory as frontier. For example, Bowden, and his photographers, re-activate the frontier imaginary with the photo “Barren Frontier,” which captures a vast expanse and a barbed-wire fence that ends at a monument marker. The anchor that accompanies the photo fixes its signification:

East of Naco, a monument and a barbed-wire fence mark the U.S.-Mexico border. Formerly Mexican territory, the United States purchased southern reaches of Arizona and New Mexico from Mexico in 1853. Five years before that, at the end of the Mexican-American war, Mexico had ceded to the United States much of the territory that now makes up the southwestern U.S.”.

Pratt argues in *Imperial Eyes* that colonizers employed theories of fiction in order to exclude the original inhabitants from their “original visions” of the places described in their travelogues, allowing them to reinvent these spaces as “new”. I find that the multiple open and picturesque landscapes selected and described by Bowden and/or his photographers work together to re-create an imperial vision. Furthermore, to mention the purchase of western territory reduces the violent history of westward expansion in the U.S. as a simple capitalist exchange. It also reactivates Jeffersonian/expansionist notions in which purchase justified invasion: “Even when adding territory through war, the United States would often insist on paying something” (Stephanson 23). Furthermore,
Bowden’s title connotes an infertile, unused space that is open to exploration, by the “frontiersman”, who is imagined as non-Mexican in the overall narrative.

The “frontiersman” for Turner is the man that advances civilization towards the territories and peoples that are viewed as barbaric. This man both knows and learns to survive in what are imagined as “primitive” lands. Furthermore, according to Turner, the “American Essence” is represented by the life of the “frontiersman”: “the frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people” (22). Turner believed that the evolution of the American political institutions depended on the advance of the “frontier” and believed that “the demand for land and the love of wilderness freedom drew the frontier ever onward” (22).

All of these notions are re-activated in the McGivney *Backpacker* article. McGivney describes wilderness exploration in terms that work to imagine the borderlands as a frontier. Furthermore, McGivney ultimately promotes the reclamation of this wilderness by its new “frontiersmen”—security agents of the state and “authorized backpackers”. Reflecting on her time in the OPCNM, McGivney and her fellow travelers and guides, “travelees” as Pratt would call them, head across the border to Sonoyta, with its requisite “dusty, trash-lined streets,” as McGivney describes it:

…where an estimated 1,500 people arrive every day hoping to cross. At the top of a barren hill in the middle of town, we drink beer and look north. Beyond the burglar bars, chipped paint, stray dogs, and junk cars is the vast wilderness of Organ Pipe and the Cabeza. It stretches across the horizon, Sweetwater Pass a not-so-distant notch. When cast in the gentle
light of sunset, the jagged desert landscape is inviting. Purple mountains.

Majesty. From where we’re standing, America is beautiful. (88)

Here McGivney recreates what Pratt (Imperial Eyes) described as the monarch-of-all-I-see perspective so prevalent in imperial travelogues.38

Furthermore, just as Turner describes the “army post, [as] serving to protect the settlers from the Indians, [that] also acted as a wedge to open the Indian country, and [became] a nucleus for settlement” (16), McGivney demonstrates how the OPCMN has its park rangers and Border Patrol agents like Glen Payne to protect the authorized excursionist. McGivney tells readers that the OPCNM can provide hikers with “[an] old-fashioned frontier adventure” (42), which even includes state protection for authorized explorers. As she reports, park superintendent Bill Wellman is planning to establish new east-to-west trails in the monument in order “to minimize migrant encounters” (88). These trails could then be added to her list of “Alien-Free Border Hikes”.

McGivney further constructs the image of the “Wild West” frontier with the use of the photograph “Law and Order,” in which Border Patrol agent Glen Payne is posed in a medium shot, leaning against a boundary marker of the U.S. With his arms crossed and his cowboy hat, in addition to McGivney’s notification that he smokes Winston cigarettes and wears cowboy boots, his image is reminiscent of a John Wayne-sheriff character from a western cowboy film. Gazing towards Mexico, poised literally on the border, Payne connotes vigilance and protection against the threats that have been imagined by McGivney.

38 See previous Pratt discussion on p. 20.
Having established the binary between the threats and protectors in this frontier space, McGivney, in true expansionist fashion, encourages her readers to re-claim the wilderness through its exploration: “Getting our boots dirty in Organ Pipe may be the best way to take back the desert” (88):

Which is easier said than done. Organ Pipe today offers something very different than the tidy, well-mannered wilderness experience we prefer. Solitude, safety, Leave No Trace ethics, camping etiquette, roadlessness—all of these things have gone to hell, producing the kind of frontier chaos that drove our pioneer ancestors to settle in towns. And willfully occupying a place that’s littered with panties and thousands of people—the irony is almost painful. To save the thing we love, we would risk types of encounters we despise. But what’s our choice? Can we allow the eternal resting place of Ed Abbey to become the exclusive stamping ground of border cops and criminals? (88)

To construct the frontera as frontier, using imperial terminology similar to that found in Jefferson and Turner, Bowden, and especially McGivney, as demonstrated above, signal in their discourse that which is the new “blot on the surface” that will not be tolerated. While the narratives of manifest destiny from the nineteenth century designated indigenous peoples as exterminable, here we see how the frontera as frontier discourse points towards the undocumented border crosser as “a common danger, demanding united attention” (Turner 15). Notably, while redeploying the frontier discourse, any and all Native American claims to, and histories in, borderlands are simultaneously erased
while nonetheless couching arguments in defense of the sacred. Both McGivney and Cahill invoke the spiritual presence of Edward Abbey to encourage reclamation and protection of the borderlands wilderness while simultaneously erasing any indigenous sacred qualities that could project distinct imaginations of protectors and threats.

The frontier discourse that is crafted and redeployed in these exploration texts is also utilized in the visual televised texts studied in the next chapter. The frontier scenario serves to support discourses that advocate for ever greater militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands and U.S. immigration regime by crafting the migrant as a threat. Just as I have demonstrated how Homeland Security USA’s use of the “Swiss Miss” construction participates in a broader project of crafting a frontier discourse through the production of the vulgar and threatening migrant, I will explore in the next chapter how Border Wars and Homeland Security USA support increases in militarization by deploying a number of visual strategies, and by producing a number of imaginations, not the least of which is the borderlands as frontier.
CHAPTER TWO: THE SPECTACLE OF DETENTION AND REMOVAL: ENVISIONING AND DISAPPEARING MIGRANTS ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

“The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation between people, mediated by images” Guy Debord.

“For the spectacle is both the meaning and the agenda of our particular socio-economic formation. It is the historical moment in which we are caught”-- Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle.

In the first episode, “No End in Sight”, of the first season of Border Wars, we follow Border Patrol Agent Dan McClafferty on his daily mission patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona. We are told by the voice over, and shown by the cameras, that securing the border involves “hard, tedious, dangerous grunt work”. McClafferty spots fresh footprints on a dirt road. In a series of medium and close shots with a hand held camera of the agent and the footprints, McClafferty demonstrates to viewers how he determines that they are fresh prints: given their characteristics and the recent rainfall, three booted men should be no more than three miles away. A helicopter is deployed to search for the suspected unauthorized border crossers. A long shot captures its flyover. The helicopter pilot spots the men and signals their location to McClafferty and other agents on all-terrain vehicles that have been called in. The cameramen, we are told, were told to stay back, in case the men are armed. Two unarmed men are discovered hiding in a clump of bushes. A third is found nearby.
The scene unfolds in a series of shots of the helicopter and front and revolved shots of the agents and the detainees. In one shot from behind, one male agent clings to the shirt of the detainee, his gun crosses his back. He walks him towards the other men and all three are seated together on the ground. They are Mexican men, between the ages of thirty and fifty, I estimate. One of the men is interviewed. He looks to be in his mid-forties. He cries and tells the camera/interviewer that he is unable to make enough money in Mexico to support his family, so he comes to the U.S. to work.

In this first episode, and as shown in the third episode, the show presents what it defines as the “border war”, while also presenting the futile nature of this mission and the resources invested in it. As the voiceover explains to the spectators, as McClafferty and his fellow agents mill around the detained migrants, assessing the results of their mission, ‘it took over four hours, agents on foot, on ATVs, in two jeeps and a helicopter to track and detain three tired and thirsty men who came to this country looking for work’ (10:09). We are also told that the three migrants will most likely be quickly deported, with little stopping them from trying it all over again. There is no suggestion that the detainees could be folded in to the detention and removal process in which they could potentially be detained for months to years as they await their deportation. The lengthy and legally exceptional U.S. immigrant detention and removal program that afflicts immigrants detained throughout the U.S. does not apparently figure in to what The National Geographic Channel wishes to define as the “Border War”. To focus on the border patrol apprehension and to suggest that those apprehended on camera will be funneled through the “expedited removal” process delinks the border apprehension from
the broader project of “Detention and Removal”, cleansing it of messy details. What this scene does present as the elements of the “Border War”, as it will do time and again throughout the series, are visible and deportable “illegal aliens”, successful and yet always failing security forces, and the dangerous inhospitable terrain of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The scene described above forms part of what I refer to as a border spectacle: the visual construction of the social relations, meanings and agendas that are visualized and disappeared in a collection of images of the U.S.-Mexico border. Within this border spectacle these particular examples also produce a spectacle of detention and removal: the mediatized manifestation of official U.S. immigration policies in their neoliberal context.

In this chapter, I study the construction and use of spectacles of detention and removal of migrants in the United States and I examine how these spectacles do particular kinds of representational and constitutive work. I find that the spectacle of detention and removal makes visible, and invisible, certain elements of the detention and removal process so as to do certain kinds of work in the frame of (or name of) neoliberalism and national security. This work includes but is not limited to advocating for increased militarization of the nation and its borders, criminalization and marginalization of immigrants, participation in Low Intensity Conflict, and possible advocacy for immigration reform.

In particular, following De Genova, (“Culprits”) and (“Legal Production of Illegality”), I find that the spectacle of detention and removal produces a visible migrant
illegality, deportability, and ultimately detainability that attempts to produce, through its visibility, a more fearful and therefore tractable migrant labor force. The visual production of migrant detainability and deportability, as De Genova (“Culprits”) suggests also serves to relegate other detainable and removable groups such as suspected terrorists to further states of exception. All the while, the spectacle of detention and removal simultaneously fulfills the profitability agenda of the neoliberal North American project wherein, even when detained and ultimately denied the ability to sell their labor, migrants still remain profitable as their detained bodies produce profits for private incarceration enterprises, and even the fast food chains that supply them “food”—conditions that are manufactured, induced and/or sustained by the military state. In this detention and removal militarized project, the dangerous bodies, made intelligible via their visual criminalization, that are needed to justify the military project ultimately labor for both the state as well as private enterprise, either as detainees or as cheap labor.

While De Genova (“Culprits”) (“Legal Production of Illegality”) and De Genova and Nathalie Peutz, eds., in The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement, focus their studies and texts on the legal production of the condition of illegality and deportability, and how States deploy deportation and detention against migrants, my research, on the other hand, centers on how popular visual culture, in this case the television shows Border Wars and Homeland Security USA, produce the spectacle of detention and removal that effectively does the requisite representative and constitutive work, such as the production of migrant illegality, needed to further justify the privatized for-profit detention and security industries and militarization. In what
follows, I will address these two main questions: How do these television shows produce migrant illegality, deportability and detainability? And, how do these states or conditions of illegality, deportability and detainability labor in the service of the neoliberal project?

The objects of contemporary U.S. visual culture in which I study the production of this border spectacle are the television programs *Homeland Security USA (HSUSA)* and The National Geographic channel’s *Border Wars*. In particular, I examine how these visual discourses about the U.S.-Mexico border, configure migrants, the border, border security and further neoliberal agendas? As De Genova writes “it is precisely the border that provides the exemplary theater for staging the spectacle of ‘the illegal alien’ that the law produces. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, U.S. immigration enforcement efforts consistently and disproportionately targeted the U.S.-Mexico border, sustaining a zone of relatively high tolerance within the interior” (Working the Boundaries 242). As this phenomenon is changing, as evidenced in recent upswings in work place raids, I examine in the fourth chapter precisely how the staging, and disappearing, of the spectacle of detention and removal in the interior of the U.S. does particular kinds of constitutive work within the neoliberal agenda, particularly in the case of the 2008 workplace raid in Postville, Iowa. De Genova also argues that: “The elusiveness of the law, and its relative invisibility in producing ‘illegality,’ requires this spectacle of enforcement at the border, which renders a radicalized Mexican/migrant ‘illegality’ visible, and lends it the commonsensical air of a natural fact” (Working the Boundaries 242). In this chapter, we will see not only how *Border Wars* and *HSUSA* make migrant

39 As demonstrated in my chapter on documentary films and migrant experiences, this “tolerance in the interior” has changed more recently.
illegality visible, but I also examine how these visualizations of illegality via border enforcement, tend to reduce the U.S.-Mexico migratory experience and border to a series of simplified stock elements which serve to distract from the more complex and inhumane elements of U.S. immigration policies and their enforcement, from their roots in the neoliberal socio-economic structure, to the attendant experiences of the lower migrant class within the striated zones of exception that are both the state of illegality as well as detention and removal regime.

I utilize Guy Debord’s notion of spectacle as an analytical category because it signals the inter-working relationships between visibility, invisibility, and capitalism. In his critical reflections on modern capitalism and consumerism, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord describes the spectacle as “not a collection of images, but a social relation between people, mediated by images” (95). According to Debord, the spectacle functions much like a visual illusion in that obscures and distracts, particularly from the functioning of capital accumulation. As Nicholas Mirzoeff describes it, “the spectacle conceals the workings of capital” (264). Mirzoeff uses the example of the McDonald’s golden arches to describe how the spectacularity of corporate logos distract their consumers from the capital inner-workings and outcomes, such as the ‘poor working conditions of fast-good employees or the poor nutritional quality of the food’. As Mirzoeff describes it, “[t]he connection between labor and capital is lost in the dazzle of the spectacle. In the spectacular society we are sold the sizzle rather than the steak, the image rather than the object” (265). Debord’s notion of the spectacle envisions spectators as individuals that are both always already imagined as consumers and made to become
passive consumers by the glittering distraction of the spectacle. Debord’s writing emphasizes the distracting and concealing potential of the visual spectacle. For Debord resistance can come in the form of the “detournement” in which in spectacle’s images are inverted or intervened upon.

In this chapter, I aim to examine that which these collections of images make visible, as well as that from which they possibly distract when representing borders and migrants. This chapter also brings together the notions of surveillance and spectacle, as Mirzoeff notes:

[spectacle] does not, however, account for all images. W.J.T. Mitchell has usefully suggested that the spectacle needs to be understood as being one part of a structure completed by surveillance. If spectacle distracts by illusion, surveillance claims to see what is real. (267)

In the case of this study, I am interrogating the confluence of spectacle and surveillance, in televised spectacles of surveillance, and security. As Mitchell describes these terms: “Spectacle is the ideological form of pictorial power; surveillance is its bureaucratic, managerial and disciplinary form” (327). *Border Wars* and *HSUSA* offer for spectators a convergence of the two image relations, inviting viewers to visually participate in a spectacle of border surveillance, militarization and migrant detention.

I also utilize Debord’s notion of the spectacle due to its conceptualization of the relationships between society and images. As Diana Taylor states, “[t]he society of the spectacle, to borrow Debord’s term, ties individuals into an economy of looks and looking” (119). Furthermore the spectacle also points to the slippage that exists between
the material and the symbolic in visual media, particularly as it relates to the U.S.-Mexico border. Ironically, I find that the border spectacle simultaneously masks and reveals the workings of capitalism that Debord argues are hidden by the spectacle. Indeed, these television shows make apparent some of the crucial elements for the functioning of late neoliberal capitalism, namely unauthorized migrant labor and its militarized oversight. Whether they are viewed as such, depends on the perspective of the spectator.

I take my language directly from policies, such as NAFTA, whose preamble states that the three governments resolve to “Strengthen the special bonds of friendship and cooperation among their nations; Contribute to the harmonious development and expansion of world trade and provide a catalyst to broader international cooperation”; and the U.S. immigration policy “Operation Endgame”, outlined in Endgame: Office of Detention and Removal Strategic Plan, 2003-2012: Detention and Removal Strategy for a Secure Homeland: a “multi-year strategic enforcement plan” whose goal is to “build the capacity to ‘remove all removable aliens’” (ii). “Operation Endgame” exists alongside NAFTA, in what at first glance appears to be a glaring contradiction, however in the final analysis it contributes to the neoliberal agenda by further producing and maintaining a detainable and deportable work force. Wherein the neoliberal dispositif recasts governmentality along economic lines, it also simultaneously recasts profitability along the lines of biopolitical governmentality, and through these channels, biopolitics and the management of biological life can more exquisitely yield profitability.40

40 For discussion on the private incarceration and immigrant detention industry see Peter Rothberg’s “Immigrants for Sale”.
Visual Production of the Lived Conditions of Detainability and Deportability

The image of deportable and detainable immigrants is key for the functioning of this neoliberal dispositif. As De Genova elaborates, the condition of illegality provides an apparatus that produces and sustains the vulnerability and tractability of Mexican migrants as labor (“Culprits” 426-427). De Genova describes illegality as a spatialized condition that is inseparable from the particular ways in which migrant workers are racialized as “illegal aliens” within the U.S., and thus racialized as “Mexican” in relation to “Americaness” (“Culprits” 426, 443-444). Furthermore, as De Genova (Working the Boundaries) highlights, the category and lived reality of “illegality” is produced not to actually meet the purported goal of deportation, that is to really deport all deportable denizens, but rather in order to regulate the flow of Mexican migration and to sustain its legally vulnerable condition of deportability. “It is deportability, and not deportation per se, that has historically rendered Mexican labor as a distinctly disposable commodity” (De Genova “Legal Production of Illegality” 179). Along these lines, the televised security spectacle, that Border Wars and HSUSA produce, contributes to the production of visible migrant illegality and deportability.

However, as De Genova notes in his more recent studies (“Culprits”), the condition of deportability has come to signify new meanings in the post-9/11 Homeland Security State. Where deportability has traditional attempted to maintain a tractable and disposable labor force, “Operation Endgame” and the emergence of the Homeland Security state effectively alter the traditional pattern of deploying migrant deportability. The current U.S. security regime, as demonstrated in part in “Operation Endgame” seeks
to expand the purview of Borders and Customs officials from capturing undocumented border crossers to rounding-up, detaining and “removing” undocumented denizens living in the U.S. Following De Genova (“Culprits”), this expansion of the Homeland Security State, further exploits the condition of deportability, particularly by developing the more insidious and legally exceptional categories of detainability and removability. However, as De Genova keenly notes, in the now ongoing War on Terror, in which the Homeland Security State is an imperative element, the condition of deportability also serves as an entry to the conditions of removability, detainability and ultimate disappearance and death, physical or social. De Genova (“Culprits”) argues that the production of visible deportable aliens works to both produce visible culprits and to also cull these visible deportees from the more menacing, invisible terrorist subject. Therefore the spectacle of detention and removal that spectators watch on *Border Wars* and *HSUSA*, does the performative work of the state. De Genova argues that while it is unproductive to mark undocumented migrants as terrorists, as they are ultimately “desired and demanded for their labor” (“Culprits” 438). Rather, De Genova finds that:

> it is sufficient to mobilize the metaphysics of antiterrorism to do the crucial work of continually and more exquisitely stripping these “illegal” workers of even the most pathetic vestiges of legal personhood, such that their own quite laborious predicament of rightslessness may be further amplified and disciplined. This is precisely what is presently at stake for immigration politics in the United States. (“Culprits” 438)
Along these lines, the migrant laborer and his or her deportability continues to labor in the service of various others. The legal production of the conditions of deportability, detainability and removability requires the deployment of various armaments, not the least of which are visual media platforms that produce the necessary images for constructing states of insecurity.

The border security spectacle that is constituted in *Border Wars* and *HSUSA* produces the visible illegal alien. The visible capture of border crossers, effectively produces a culprit, and as De Genova argues, “Producing culprits produces insecurity—this indeed appears to be the goal of Homeland Security” (“Culprits” 436). Insecurity is produced through a variety of methods. I find that security programs such as *Operation Endgame* and neoliberal agendas, as exemplified by NAFTA, especially their contradictory and complimentary fissures, are visually manifested and mediatized in the television programs *Border Wars* on The National Geographic Channel and ABC’s *Homeland Security USA*. For example, we must always keep in mind how NAFTA makes no provisions for

Following Naomi Klein’s theory of the shock doctrine and disaster capitalism, that utilize moments of collective social trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering, “Operation Endgame” can be understood as an integral element of the Post-September 11th, 2001 disaster capitalism complex, which according to Klein is marked by a global war fought by private companies for profit, involvement paid for with public money. In the case of “Operation Endgame” and immigration policies, these private companies would be the private incarceration agencies and private contractors hired to
construct border fences and other military installations. However, on *HSUSA* and *Border Wars* we predominantly see the employees of the state and the lines to private enterprise are obscured. While “Operation Endgame” outlines the government’s plan for detaining and removing all removable aliens, the television programs *Homeland Security USA* and *Border Wars* become the televised manifestations of *Operation Endgame* and the disaster capitalism complex, in which post 9/11 fear and shock is used to bring about a real or perceived increase in national security measures.

Furthermore, this examination demonstrates how the spectacle of detention and removal also relies upon and re-activates a frontier scenario in order to be intelligible. As we saw in chapter one, in the frontier scenario the U.S.-Mexico border is imagined as a dangerous frontier space in need of protection by rugged, sanctioned explorers and military personnel.

**Embedding the Military in the Media: “Observational Doc” Style and “Scientific Credibility”**

Another important element of the continuum that exists between the first and second chapters is that here too I am examining another National Geographic product. Given that National Geographic’s mission is “to inspire people to care about the planet”, we must assume this mission extends to the television channel and subsequently, somehow, to the TV show *Border Wars*. As the General Manager and President of the National Geographic Channel Steve Schiffman, claims:

‘The National Geographic brand has been around for more than 120 years. We have been the window on the world for people for a long, long time on
a worldwide basis. Our mission is to inspire people to care about the planet, and the National Geographic Channel has provided a tremendous amount of reach to satisfy that curiosity people have about the planet’. (Liesse 2)

However, when I consider Border Wars, and the articles from National Geographic and National Geographic Adventure studied in chapter one, I find that they tend to depart from the goal of inspiring people to care about the planet and instead aim to inspire people to fear the world around them, and all the while consume their sensational spectacles of danger. The focus on danger, and therefore insecurity, seems particularly prevalent on the National Geographic television channel. While the channel, and its website, with links to approximately four thousand hours of on-line videos, includes offerings such as the “Exploration and Adventure” series, whose programming is similar to the traditional exploration television specials and articles that explore “exotic” flora, fauna and people that the magazine has famously produced for over one hundred years, the National Geographic Channel (Nat Geo) website, however, advertises and frontloads links that center on violence and danger. In spite of the National Geographic Society’s mission is to inspire environmental sentiment and conservation, their television

41 For example, the first twelve full episodes listed and linked on the channel’s website, under the heading “Explorer”, which is one of the T.V. series on the channel, are: “Search for the Afghan Girl,” “Jellyfish Invasion,” “Inside the Nuclear Threat,” “Worlds most Dangerous Drug,” “Heroin Crisis” “Super Carrier,” “Female Suicide Bombers,” “Science of Surveillance,” “Shark Superhighway,” “Inside Shock and Awe,” “Inside North Korea,” and “Worlds Most Dangerous Gang.” http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/player/national-geographic-channel/full-episodes/explorer/ngc-search-for-the-afghan-girl.html.
channels and their media-rich websites, in addition to the magazines, in fact do quite a bit of work to inspire fear. I find that, the National Geographic products as well as the non-National Geographic texts studied here, do not provoke fear of environmental destruction, which could potentially promote environmental conservation, as much they provoke fear of others and tend to promote violence and militarized self-preservation.

National Geographic’s projects are available to the public in multiple “cross-platform offerings,” in which a magazine article often has an accompanying television episode, as well as online content in the form of “blogs, games and webisodes” (Liesse 2). For example, the Bowden article studied in chapter one also includes an online photographers’ field notes, and Border Wars has online episodes, web-content and a web-game “You are a Border Agent”, which will be analyzed here. The National Geographic Channel executives attribute the channel’s success to the combination of the use of trusted brand name and its partnership with Fox Networks Group. According to Tony Vinciquerra, outgoing chairman-CEO of Fox Networks Group, interviewed by Liesse in Advertising Age, ‘Fox provides the business acumen’ and National Geographic works as the “moral compass” (2). In the article, Border Wars is cited as one of the network’s most recent successes, following record-breakers like the “Inside 9/11” special that ran in 2005.

The National Geographic channel uses the organization’s “scientific credibility” to explore and entertain in ways that seem quite distant from the mission of inspiring people

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42 National Geographic has a second television channel, National Geographic Wild, whose listings include shows such as Caught in the Act, Crimes against Nature, Dangerous Encounters, Deadly 60, and Expedition Wild.
to care about the planet. As Julie Liesse (2011) writes in Advertising Age’s special advertising section article “Nat Geo at 10: Saluting a Decade of Exploring Success”, the success, i.e. “household penetration”, that has grown from ten million to seventy million, of the National Geographic channel can be attributed to the value of the brand.

‘The National Geographic brand, and the famed yellow border that for 100 years has graced the cover of the magazine and now appears as the network’s signature ‘bug,’ stand for ‘powerful storytelling and unrivaled imagery,’ says Kiera Hynninen, exec VP-marketing for the network. ‘This brand is about being smart, relevant, trusted, thought-provoking and entertaining’. (1-2)

Liesse continues: “One of the critical points of difference for NGC has been its scientific credentials—going back more than 120 years to the creation of the National Geographic Society. ‘We are the home to passionate explorers, scientists and filmmakers,’ Ms. Hynninen says. […] Those kinds of scientific credentials give the network’s programming team, producers and filmmakers the ability to cover material from the inside” (2).

According to National Geographic executives, their scientific credential and brand-trust affords the channel a number of high profile and inside access opportunities, such as President Obama’s inaugural flight aboard Air Force One and multiple diplomatic trips with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (Liesse 2). For example, Border Wars touts, in voice-overs, its unprecedented access to the men and women who defend our borders. The camera operators are embedded with ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs
Enforcement) agents, recording these agents’ active performances of inspections, detentions, chasing migrants, tracking others and patrolling the border. However, given that Backpacker Magazine’s Annette McGivney and ABC’s Homeland Security USA, and National Geographic’s Border Wars, all seem to share in the “unprecedented access” to U.S. security officials, what is revealed is not so much National Geographic’s, unique qualities but rather the incestuous relationship between popular mass media and the U.S. State. In particular, the U.S. State’s desire to make visible particular elements of its security regime, not the least of which are its continuing successes and failures and therefore need for ongoing and ever increasing funding.

The last point is laid bare in an on-line video (“CBP and Border Wars Season Seven Debuts”) produced by The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Public Affairs Visual Communication Division in which the CBP and Border Wars producers and executives celebrate, together, the debut of the seventh season of Border Wars and their success and the hard work of the men and women of CBP, as demonstrated in the show. In this video, Thomas Winkowski, CBP Acting Chief Operating Officer equates Border Wars’ high ratings with what he understands to be the global viewing public’s interest in “how we protect the homeland”. He also notes that Border Wars offers a platform from which to “tell CBP’s story”. When Winkowski’s comment is taken in combination with Border War’s Maryanne Culpepper’s comments that the show is in the business of following the agents, allowing their actions to produce the story, it becomes apparent that the U.S. State, via Border Wars (and/or similar platforms) is highly influential in crafting the images that spectators can see on the show.
In similar fashion, *Border Wars*’ predecessor *HSUSA* also touted their privileged access on the show and on their website. While *HSUSA* only had a one-season, thirteen episode lifespan on ABC, in many ways it passed on its torch to *Border Wars* on the National Geographic Channel. *HSUSA* premiered in January 2009 and featured eight or more locations in the “100,000 miles of American Borders patrolled by the Department of Homeland Security” (*HSUSA* website). The program centered on interactions, or more accurately, inspections, between Homeland Security employees and the individuals, or objects, entering the United States via airports, seaports and land borders, both official checkpoints and open land.

Each episode was formed by a series of segments that demonstrated homeland security enforcement agencies at work, checking identifications, tearing apart cars filled with drugs, as well as interrogating, detaining and arresting individuals. The program’s website claims that it gives its viewers “an unprecedented look at the work of these men and women while they use the newest technology to safeguard our county and enforce our laws. […] These aren’t heroes. They’re average men and women working against an epic landscape” (*HSUSA* website).

While *HSUSA* is now almost impossible to locate on-line, its broadcast and lifetime on the internet nonetheless contributed to the public imaginary on national security, especially in reference to national security performed at various borders, or sights where U.S. sovereignty is performed such as (ports, airports, land and sea borders).

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43 “*Homeland Security USA* has been given unprecedented access to the agencies of the Department of Homeland Security and has the full cooperation of CBP (Customs and Border Protection) including CBP’s Border Patrol; ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement); TSA (Transportation Security Administration); USCG (United States Coast Guard) and USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services)” (*HSUSA* website).
The show does still have the remnants of a website and during its broadcast the website included links to videos that have since been deactivated.

Perhaps the visual imagery has been removed as part of the “natural” live cycle of what networks maintain online, due to advertising contracts or other economic factors. Clearly scarcity and limitability are integral parts of the capitalistic machine in order to further exploit monopoly rents. On the other hand, I am also left to question why particular pieces of visual culture disappear or are made very difficult to retrieve where others remain readily available. As we will see throughout this study, the removal of certain videos, games and episodes from circulation makes them more resistant to critique. At the same time, it does not render them powerless wherein they have existed in a realm of visual flashes and moments that thousands viewed (at least once).

Furthermore, many of the representations produced on the now defunct HSUSA are similarly re-staged in Border Wars. Allowing at least one television network to continue to have and make visual its unprecedented access. According to National Geographic executives, its scientific credential and brand-trust affords the channel (and organization in general) a number of high profile inside access opportunities. As a continuation to my findings in chapter one, here again we see how these objects of visual culture, in particular the National Geographic products, utilize their journalistic qualities and documentary\textsuperscript{44} style to establish themselves as credible sources of truth.

National Geographic utilizes its tradition “scientific credibility” to validate, and

\textsuperscript{44} On the Customs and Border Patrol on-line video covering the festivities for the Season Seven premier of Border Wars in Washington D.C., Maryanne Culpepper, President of National Geographic Television/Production refers to Border Wars as an “observational doc” constrasting it with “reality television” claiming “we don’t create the television we’re producing, it unfolds before us…”
ultimately profit from, its contemporary products. Much of this historical credibility is owed to its reliance upon its story telling and photography. As John Tagg signals photographic records, along with written documentation, have been considered and used as sources of objective evidence and truth, since their inceptions and especially by institutions of power. “The value of the camera was extolled because the optical and chemical processes of photography were taken to designate a scientifically exploited but ‘natural’ mechanism producing ‘natural’ images whose truth was guaranteed” (255). In the case of National Geographic products, the myth of photographic truth is compounded with what Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright refer to as “Scientific looking” and “images as evidence”.

As The National Geographic Channel’s Schiffman explains:

‘The National Geographic brand is trusted, it’s respected, it is authoritative; [...] [it provides] ‘quality programming—programming that finds a balance between knowledge and entertainment. In a time when there’s a lot of content that is not as quality-oriented, National Geographic Channel answers to a higher authority through very strict standards and practices, with authenticate factual accuracy, the appropriateness and its linkage to various scientific discoveries’. (Liesse 3)

However, as Schiffman suggests, viewers can distinguish between high and low quality content. Furthermore, as Cartwright and Sturken signal, even though photographs, and high-tech imagery, especially in the scientific context have been developed and used as ways to better know, see and understand particular sets of evidence, nonetheless
“scientific looking” is always caught up in culturally influenced forms of looking” (280). So while “[a] photograph is often perceived to be an unmediated copy of the real world. […] Our awareness of the subjective nature of imaging is in constant tension with the legacy of objectivity that clings to the cameras and machines that produce images today” (Sturken and Cartwright 17). In the case of the objects of visual culture studied in here, we must be cognizant of the tension between how the images are employed as agents of objective evidence and how they can be critically viewed.

*Border Wars* offers, and exploits, its documentary filming characteristics and credibility to provide spectators with an ‘inside’ view of the work of the agents of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, as well as with images of the myriad high and low tech surveillance techniques and equipment that are used by the various border agencies. *Border War’s* “about” section on its website describes the program in the following:

Every day thousands of men, women and children attempt to enter the United States illegally — some looking for work, some seeking a new life and others trying to smuggle drugs or other contraband. Many will do whatever it takes, often risking their lives by crossing Arizona’s treacherous Sonoran Desert. Now, follow the officers and agents of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as they scour the inhospitable landscape at one of the busiest border crossings in the country, seeking to fight terrorism and intercept illegal entrants from the air, on the ground and at the ports of entry.

Ride along on chases, rescues and busts with the brand-new series Border
Wars. NGC cameras were given special access to go on duty with CBP agents and officers as they use every means at their disposal — from high-tech stealth planes to basic wilderness skills — to track, catch and deport illegal immigrants. We are there as officers and agents race to save illegal immigrants from possible death in desert heat, uncover a shocking smuggling strategy involving children and find a cache of narcotics that sets a new record for a single seizure (National Geographic Channel website).

This long citation not only summarizes much of what the Border Wars television show aims to make visible, it also demonstrates how National Geographic attempts to sell its “access” to otherwise apparently restricted government agents and activities. The statement also demonstrates how both National Geographic and the U.S. state seem to be mutual beneficiaries of this process. While Border Wars claims, as seen in the first sentences here, and throughout the episodes, to recognize the variety of reasons that motivate migrants to cross into the U.S., without authorization, the show never offers a complex or in-depth analysis of the conditions that structure Mexican migration to the U.S. Furthermore, the migrant perspective is rarely provided. There are segments that follow undocumented immigrants to their homes in the U.S., but overall Border Wars, like HSUSA, positions its cameras so as to align with the perspectives of the Border Patrol agents and Customs and Enforcement officers. The spectator of Border Wars is invited to see the U.S.-Mexico border from the perspective of the U.S. security agent. In this way, the neo-imperial military project of neoliberalism and its associated, even
requisite border militarization are not problematized by *Border Wars*, but rather are advocated for through the constant reproduction and repetition of the visible military hero (Border Patrol agent) whose presence is demanded by the border’s ongoing state of insecurity, which according *Border Wars*, is produced by the crossers and not the active militarization of the territory.

“**You are a Border Agent**: Inviting the Spectator to adopt the Militarized Gaze of the Border and Migrant

In the opening sequence of *Border Wars*, Season 1: Episode 1 (S1:E1)- the U.S.–Mexico border is defined for viewers. The voice-over tells us that the U.S-Mexico border is a line that divides two people. Two languages; Two economies, etc. These descriptions are visually matched with a crosscutting of images so as to align the contrasting images to their distinct characteristics, making visible the “two people” that the border divides. Read U.S to Mexico as indicated by the images of national flags, *Border Wars* presents its viewers with two divergent shots: the first is a medium-long shot of blonde toddler who stands next to the legs of an adult and shades her eyes from the sun as she attempts to get a better look at something. The order directs spectators to read this image as representative of the U.S.. The second is a medium-long shot of a young brown man wearing a baseball cap, looking over the rusty metal fence—read Mexico. The fence traverses his face leaving visible only his eyes and nose. He looks directly at the camera. As this young man looks like a lot of the other men we will see detained by Border Patrol agents in *Border Wars*, he comes to embody the threat to the U.S. nation state, which is similarly embodied by the blonde toddler that must be protected by the male agent.
This little blonde girl is further contrasted with the little Mexican twin girls that are physically and visually captured in a scene titled “Human Smugglers” in the third episode, entitled “Last Defense”, of the first season. In the scene a group of migrants is detained along the Arizona-Sonora border. Scenes capturing the physical apprehension of border crossers abound in *Border Wars*, however in this scene among the apprehended border crossers are two Mexican twin girls. Their faces are blurred. We see them in their matching pink and black outfits. This is one of the few scenes in which women and children are visible in *Border Wars*, in which the majority of visible detainees are men. We are told by the Border Patrol agents that detained this group, and by the voiceover, that these two girls are “human cargo” and appear to be questionably accompanied by a godfather whose intentions and identity are deemed suspicious by the security officers. While the man claims to be taking the girls to their parents in the United States, the agent’s on-camera comments, coupled with voice-over, tell viewers that the girls could be smuggled into child labor or prostitution. At the end of the segment, a written caption tells the viewers that the girls were handed over to the Mexican consulate. No further details are given about what became of the man that accompanied them, nor if he was in fact their godfather.

While the twins are effectively imagined as innocents in this scene, and not described as “anchor children” (another term that is defined and visualized in the first episode of “Border Wars”), they are characterized as victims of dangerous, irresponsible or perhaps even deviant guardianship on the part of their caretakers. When considered together, these two exemplary scenes demonstrate how *Border Wars* constructs visual
discourses that imagine a pure U.S. nation, projected through its citizens, against threatening others, who are subsequently visualized as deviant and vulgarized impurities.

As the voice of an officer tells us in the “City under Siege” episode that centers on the two Nogales: Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora: “On the other side of the fence, it’s a completely different world” (S1:E2). The positing of a pure U.S. against impurities from abroad is a trope that is repeated in similar form in HSUSA, as we saw in the first chapter with the example of Nora, The Swiss Miss.

In similar fashion, HSUSA utilizes the coordination of the visual and audio to configure the criminal threat to the “homeland”, captured in the borderlands. One threat portrayed in the first episode is that of a group of migrants who are detained in the Arizona desert. The scene is formed by intermingling images of the cacti and close ground shots of a tarantula and rattlesnake. While those of us who live in the Arizona’s desert can attest to the relative rarity of seeing either of these creatures, at least in close succession, the program is able to portray the space as a threatening environment best negotiated by the border patrol agents. Furthermore, the collapsing of migrants with flora and fauna, as we saw in the first chapter, also functions to signal the natural stream-like threat that migrants pose for the state.

The producer of HSUSA’s comments ‘that for every one hour of programming, there were 100 hours of filming’ (HSUSA website), demonstrating the extractive and constructive nature of the television spectacle that produces a concentrated image of intense danger from what are presumably hours upon hours of mundane, non-guns-a-blazing, non-rattlesnake biting, border patrols. Nonetheless, the shots capture a group of
people seated and handcuffed. The Border Patrol officer determines that the tattoos on one of the men signal his high level of criminality and therefore, his threat to the nation. As the officer explains to viewers: “This isn’t a father coming over to provide for his family—not these guys”. While we do not see any drugs or weapons found with this group, whose crouched positions belie the claims of danger that are cast upon them, ultimately the Border Patrol officer’s reading of the migrant’s body signals to viewers that the threat to the nation is literally embodied in the migrant, and can only be correctly interpreted by the trained security officer. Just as Agent McClafferty in Border Wars has been trained to read the signs of undocumented crossers, this officer relies on his authority to testify to viewers that these migrants are in fact threatening.

Similarly, in many shots of detained migrants in Border Wars, viewers can see them but do not hear from them. Furthermore, in the few segments when detainees are interviewed, an agent offers a counter-reading of the situation, as we see in the scene in which the twins godfather is denied his claimed identity by the detaining officers, actively re-silencing the migrant and demonstrating that only the security agent, i.e., native, can read and brand the migrant body and intention, as we saw in the scene of the twin Mexican girls, whose Godfather’s attempts to cross them are read through a prism that viewed them as a deviant attempt to smuggle them into child prostitution.

Benjamin Muller in “Securing the Political Imagination: Popular Culture, the Security Dispositif and the Biometric State” signals how the emerging biometric state, in an effort to justify itself, particularly in the way it is perceived and, posits a variety of undesirable risks or “alternatives”, through the production of threatening images, that are
ultimately presented as disruptions to the current and ever expanding state form with “its reliance on risk, surveillance and biopolitical techniques” (208). The threats that are regularly re-presented in Border Wars and HSUSA work to make visible the threatening alternatives, possible risks and what-ifs that could potentially infiltrate the U.S. if it weren’t for the vigilance of the state. Thereby serving to advocate for the further expansion of the Security and Biometric State.

By filming almost exclusively from the perspective of the security agents, both Border Wars and HSUSA encourage their spectators to take up a surveillant gaze from a nativist perspective, deciding from the perspective of the native what is best for the nation and who should be allow to enter the nation space. Furthermore, it is from this perspective that spectators are able to view the non-native threats and culprits. Following Muller, the biometric state makes use of visual culture in order to assist the viewing public in learning how to “see like a state”. Muller argues that popular visual culture can help viewers see like a state wherein:

[the state] teaches the lessons of ubiquitous vulnerability and incalculable risk and in turn rationalizes attempts to securitize everything, accepting the subsequent strained relations between liberty and security, accompanying forms of social sorting and the biopolitics redux of the purified, inoculated and readable political body—a species whose functions or participation in biometry and the digital/biometric state are both killing the self and leading it towards the surveilled subject. (208)
The felicitous relationship\textsuperscript{45} between the television shows and the U.S. State allows for the television medium to make visible, perhaps even teach, the process of biopolitical sorting, as exemplified by the Border Patrol agent’s reading of the migrant body and tattoos. Furthermore, in spite of the lack of demonstrable evidence of criminality, spectators are encouraged to trust the officer’s security literacy that indexes the migrants as threatening and therefore excludable and surveillable.

Because the migrant/border crosser detention is realized on and around the body of the migrant and through its relation with the State body, embodied by the security agent, I read these visual representations of detentions as performative spectacles. In \textit{Disappearing Acts}, Diana Taylor studies the performative and spectacular nature of national identity construction and gendering. Taylor’s work provides useful insights for reading the spectacle of border security and migrant detention and its relation to what does and does not belong in its imaginary.

As noted in the first chapter, in Taylor’s study of cultural performance, \textit{The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas}, Taylor studies how scenarios function as sites for the embodied transmission of memory and desires. Taylor finds that scenarios, like that of the discovery of the Americas, are “meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes” (\textit{Archive and Repertoire} 28). Taylor describes scenarios as powerful tools whose “portable framework bears the weight of accumulative repeats” (\textit{Archive and Repertoire} 28). In the case of the frontier scenario, studied in chapter one, writers, photographers,

\textsuperscript{45} See the Customs and Border Patrol “Frontline News” video from December, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Px8eQ01R4_k>.
Editors, and television directors re-stage and re-create, yet again, the this scenario in order to project and occlude contemporary heroes and threats. As Taylor highlights, the scenario is “formulaic […] and often banal because it leaves out complexity, reduces conflict to its sock elements, and encourages fantasies of participation” (54). Taylor signals that scenarios are “re-activated” functioning as a ‘bridge between the future in the past, never for the first time and never for the last’ (58 Archive and Repertoire).

Following Taylor, here we can see how the border security spectacle also relies upon the reproduction of a border security scenario. In order for this scenario to work, or be intelligible, certain recognizable elements need to be in place so as to be reactivated. The presence of the State as embodied in the uniformed and armed individual is one of the elements required to make the detention spectacle an intelligible and legible scenario. The other, is the migrant. The stage, as we well know, is the U.S.-Mexico Border. As we have seen in HSUSA and Border Wars, this scenario is most “successful” or “intelligible” when the migrant is also made to appear as “criminal”. However, as we see in these repeated segments, whether or not a crime has been committed, the visual performance of detainment works to criminalize the migrant through the production of the handcuffed and chained (and subsequently removable) body. This visual image belies the presumption of innocence because the forced performance of criminality restages scenario of detention and treatment of a criminal. In fact, prior to crossing the border the imagined migrant is already visualized as threatening, as seen in chapter one and in the example of the young man looking over the fence in the opening sequence to Border Wars. Furthermore, by detaining and intermingling the migrant crosser or migrant worker
as discussed in the fourth chapter, with criminals, the migrant in effect becomes a criminal via the juridical and physical visual association.

Wherein these visual paradigms already assume that the migrant is inherently deportable, and ever more detainable and removable, the visual re-production of the migrant detention could be argued to not only criminalize the migrant, but rather reveal his or her inherent deportability and criminality. In so doing, the televised spectacle of detention and removal reaffirms the goal of the Homeland Security State, which according to De Genova (“Culprits”) is to produce heightened insecurity through the production of culprits.

Furthermore, through the visible detention, the migrant is already criminalized. Through these visual strategies, viewers are invited and taught to “see like a state” and thereby participate in the military biopolitical project. Seeing like a state, and/or through the eyes of the state also works to reproduce and visualize a nativist perspective. I find that HSUSA and Border Wars display the native’s point of view first and foremost by claiming that they tell the stories of the men and women who work to protect the nation. This protection occurs through the visual capture and representation of their active performance of inspections, detentions and ultimate decision making to determine who can and cannot enter the U.S. national space, identifying what is good and bad for the nation. In this way, HSUSA and Border Wars simultaneously feature and produce the “native’s point of view,” to use De Genova’s (Working the Boundaries) term: a point of view that silences the migrant by speaking for him or her and advocates for increased militarization of the nation and its borders by demonstrating its success in protecting the
nation. Furthermore, both shows’ cross-cutting of interspersed images of dessert flora and fauna and of detained migrants simultaneously point to what is matter out of place in the desert space. In the case of the apprehended migrants in the desert on HSUSA, despite the claims of the Border Patrol officer that they were dangerous, we are told that they were later deported to Mexico, and presumably not criminally charged.

*Border Wars* and HSUSA both offer a visual collage of the security officer’s workplace. As Patterson describes *HSUSA*: “[r]olling the wars on terror, drugs, and illegal immigration into one rhetorical package, *Homeland Security USA* plays partly like a pumped-up recruiting film, [and] partly like a public-affairs outreach video for hardcore video gamers”. Patterson criticizes HSUSA, arguing that the program is part of the ‘national security theater sham’ in which DHS officers are constructed as “unstoppable action figures that ‘keep us safe at home’”. While HSUSA only lasted one season, *Border Wars* is now celebrating its seventh season, suggesting that the “theater” of the border security spectacle continues to attract viewers and produce constitutive representations.

Timothy Dunn argues in *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992*, that one of the principle roles of the media in the representation of the U.S.-Mexico border is to participate in and advocate for increased militarization, in particular for a war of low intensity conflict (LIC):

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46 The Office Customs and Border Protection, Public Relations, released a video via its “Frontline News” series in which the CBP Public Relations announcer Michael Pope describes the premier that was held in Washington D.C. to celebrate the “accomplishments” of the CBP and National Geographic’s Border Wars. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Px8eQ01R4_k> “CBP Video: Border Wars Season 7 Debuts.”
since the mid-1970s, ‘border control’ has emerged as a salient topic in U.S. politics, with concern for it often spurred on by sensationalistic portrayals of undocumented immigration, drug trafficking, and occasionally even the threat of terrorism as critical issues for the U.S.-Mexico border region. Such depictions by U.S. government officials and the media have fueled a tendency to interpret these issues as potential or actual crises with national security implications. […] The image of the U.S. Mexico border region that emerges from these sorts of alarmist portrayals is that of a vulnerable zone in urgent need of numerous, serious security measures—to repel an ‘invasion’ of ‘illegal aliens,’ to win the War on Drugs, and even to counter the threat of terrorism. (1-3)

The “embedded” perspective of spectators alongside the Border Patrol agents in Border Wars induces viewers to see what the show portrays and the on-going, never ending border war, as signified by the season one first episode “No End in Sight”. The repetition of the spectacle of security and performance of the agents serves to highlight what is constructed as a constant threat. The representation of migrant flows as an unending threatening tide works to distract from the historical and traditional patterns of migration, attempting to construct migration as a characteristic of war, hence the second episode about Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, titled “City under Siege”.

The opening voice over tells us, “In a city under constant threat, these federal law enforcement officers are at the front line. They battle illegal immigration, smuggling and terrorism”. The visual match that is used to define “terrorism” is a medium shot of an
officer handcuffing a man’s hands behind his back. The man’s face is blurred and the vegetation suggests he has been detained in the desert. The visuals for “illegal immigration” are an image of a helicopter flying overhead, and two images of detained men being walked or directed by the detaining officer. The succession of shots is very rapid, lasting no more than a second or two at the longest. By including a visual match for “terrorism”, *Border Wars* effectively produces a visual spectacle of terrorist detention. No evidence is actually matched with the shot to tell viewers why this particular man was detained. But, visually, especially in the blurring in his face, he is framed to signify an unknown, even unrecognizable terrorist threat. Furthermore, here, as repeated time and time again, the Border Patrol, Customs Agents and the U.S. are portrayed as constantly “under siege”. As we are told in the same episode that focuses on Nogales, AZ, “They must defend this dangerous frontier. Day and night”. “Dangerous Frontier” is visually matched with a long shot of an aerial view of the border that divides the two Nogales.

In these scenes, we see how *Border Wars* helps to produce a war-like problem that requires military solutions. Dunn finds that since the 1970s problems along the U.S.-Mexico border have been envisioned as summarily threatening to national security and the solutions imagined have been militaristic in character. What Dunn signals, however, is how the imaginations of threats themselves are in fact driven by militaristic perspectives. *Border Wars* always already portrays the U.S. – Mexico border as a war zone and effectively only uses militaristic terms to describe the borderlands. It is rarely portrayed in any other way throughout the various episodes.
Dunn describes militarization as “in its broadest sense [it] refers to the use of military rhetoric and ideology, as well as military tactics, strategy, technology, equipment, and forces” (3). Puar offers a complementary definition, stating: “militarization is produced through flows of information and series of activities, the everyday activities of civilians that participate in and contribute to the military complex” (156). In the case of Border Wars, viewers are taught by the images and voiceovers to see the migrants as threats, such as the opening sequence that contrasts the young Mexican man looking over the fence with the little blonde toddler.

In particular, Dunn signals that the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border since the 1970s is characterized as Low Intensity Conflict (LIC). Dunn writes that the LIC doctrine was developed by the U.S. government in the 1980s in order to respond to a variety of perceived threats to national security, especially revolutionary movements in Latin America. Dunn notes that LIC is characterized by the establishment and maintenance of social control over targeted civilian populations through the implementation of broad range of sophisticated measures, such as the coordination and integration of police, paramilitary and military forces. While in theory, LIC is to be a subtle form of militarization in which troop deployment and high U.S. casualty rates are not typical elements, Dunn highlights that in practice, LIC, especially in Latin America has produced devastating human rights violations. Along the U.S.-Mexico Border, Dunn finds that since the 1970s, military solutions and militarized enforcement against

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47 Dunn notes: “the origins of LIC doctrine date back at least to the Kennedy administration’s formulation of counterinsurgency doctrine, if not to much earlier U.S. involvement in a host of so-called small wars” (20).
undocumented immigration and drug trafficking have been suggested as necessary by government officials and the media, and have been subsequently carried out via practices typical of LIC.

In particular, Dunn notes that the “Antidrug Operations,” “Terrorism Counteraction,” “Peacetime Contingency Operations,” as well as what he refers to as “Domestic Facets” are the most salient LIC elements found in the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border. Most of these elements are captured and actively performed and represented to spectators in Border Wars and HSUSA.

The “Domestic Facets” of LIC are of particular interest to Dunn and this study alike, wherein popular visual culture constitutes fertile ground for the fomentation of the militarization of civil society. Dunn signals that in addition to drug enforcement and counterterrorism initiatives, the militarization of the border, and by extension the public imaginary and space at large, requires a domestic-military relationship. As Dunn notes the category of Peacetime contingency operations “is exceptionally broad and has a strong political emphasis” (26). From “suppression of civil disorders” to “border enforcement”, Dunn highlights that “[t]hese operations often involve an integration of efforts between military and civilian agencies” (26-27). One of the key provisions for LIC doctrine recommended by the Pentagon is “domestic LIC military exercises to desensitize the U.S. citizenry to this form of militarization of society” (Dunn 28). Dunn cites U.S. Army Colonel John Waghelstein, who in 1985 explained his proposal for the increased domestic features of LIC:
‘I think we’ve also got to begin to do counterinsurgency training here in the U.S., not just on military reservations where it’s been for the last few years, but out in the countryside … in civilian areas … [I]t gets the populace familiar with this type of warfare … We’ve got to recondition our populace again, so that a soldier practicing for war, for this type of war, is seen as a regular and necessary thing’. (28)

And where better for the conditioning of the masses to the militarized practices of drug enforcement, detention and removal of migrants and the fight against terrorism than the popular visual culture in print, on the Internet and on television? Effectively, the military television that National Geographic produces, via its embedded “exclusive” access to U.S. security forces allows the spectator to become ever more familiar with warfare. Whether the spectator will decide to see it as “regular and necessary”, is ultimately up to the spectator. But in the case of Border Wars and HSUSA, the necessity of ever increasing militarization is foregrounded and repeated extensively. Wherein thousands to millions of civilians cannot physically ride along with Border Patrol agents, the cameras seemingly allow for the contact and familiarity between the military and the civilian population that LIC doctrine requires.48

In addition to the increased contact between military sectors and civilians, Dunn notes that LIC is also characterized by the “Incorporation of so-called humanitarian aid—particularly that provided by private organizations—into military and police-related

48 See Heather Trujillo’s article on the Border Patrol kids “Explorer Program”, which is sponsored by the Boy Scouts of America.
projects” (29) and by the employment of a variety of surveillance equipment and a combination of elite and non-elite troops. As Border Wars voiceovers and agent commentaries emphasize, the agents are also performing “rescue operations”, stressing how migrants have been abandoned by their smugglers and are luckily rescued by agents, and deemphasizing how border enforcement also induces migrants to travel longer distances and through more inhospitable terrain.

Border Wars also makes visible the active use of myriad forms of surveillance equipment that Dunn describes as the armaments of LIC. One segment features a drone piloted via remote control. As we see a drone airplane roll out of a hanger on to the tarmac, the voice over tells viewers that this weapon was first used in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, ‘but on the border it is only used to see’ we are told. We also see the agent who supposedly operates the drone, as well as accompanying visuals from apparent footage taken from the drone camera itself. While Border Wars seems intent on inoculating the drone, I find that the scene further demonstrates, yet obscures, how vision and surveillance are imbricated in relations of power and deployed as a weapons along the U.S.-Mexico border and against migrant bodies. As the tools of surveillance are part of the arsenal that is used to ultimately ensnare migrants, and as fear of surveillance and ultimate capture drives migrants further into the desert, their portrayal as peaceful eyes in the sky distracts from the real violence and even death they are able to induce on the ground. Furthermore, Border Wars actually also puts forth the vision of the Homeland Security State as outlined by De Genova (“Culprits”), wherein on the U.S. –Mexico border and interior, securitization is used to ultimately render Mexican and other
Hispanic laborers deportable, and even detainable, but not to render them killable as their labor is needed. The drone here, as a clear and direct extension of the Homeland Security State, works, as we are told in the voice over, to cull the Mexican migrant from the otherwise killable Afghani or Iraqi.

*Border Wars* also uses an icon of an agent seeing through binoculars in some of its advertisements, further emphasizing that the show offers to viewers the functioning of the panoptic structure. Through the repeated images of the Border Patrol’s use of an array of surveillance techniques and equipment, from low-tech panoptic positioning and the use of binoculars to drones, night-vision, mounted cameras, helicopters and ground sensors, *Border Wars* invites the viewing public both view and participate in the formation of the panoptic structure as described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*.

In “Panopticism”, Foucault analyzes how surveillance and quarantine techniques developed during the plague in the seventeenth century, as well as a how similar process of exile was used to separate those suffering from leprosy. Foucault signals how the use of these techniques gave way to a systematic surveillance system that relied upon a double mode of binary division and branding which functioned to separate the “mad” from the “sane”; “dangerous/harmless”; etc. Foucault’s focus is on those systems that exercise their power over the individual by isolating, branding and differentiating the ‘abnormal’ individual and submitting him or her to a process of surveillance as a means of controlling the individual. In reference to the title, “Panopticism”, Foucault studies the architectural surveillance structure of the panopticon. This prison structure includes a circular confinement building and central viewing tower from which the supervisor may
observe prisoners who are held in individual cells, which isolate the prisoners from one another. “Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (65). The key to having power within the panopticon is visibility; being visible and yet unverifiable are the key characteristics to this mechanization of control. In the structure of the panopticon, the central observation tower is lit and configured in such fashion as to not allow the inmate to see whether or not he or she is being observed. Foucault refers to the panopticon as a “machine” which disassociates the see/being seen dyad. This panoptic principle can then be applied in a variety of settings in which the individual is aware that he or she is observed and of the disciplinary mechanism associated with the observation.

Another characteristic of the panopticon that is of particular relevance to the analysis of the visual strategies deployed by the Border Patrol and by Border Wars is the automatization and dis-individualization of power as described by Foucault:

Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights and gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. The ceremonies, the rituals, the marks by which the sovereign’s surplus power was manifested are useless. There is machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference. Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine […]. (Discipline and Punish 66)
While the Border Patrol ultimately operate the panoptic apparatus along the U.S.–Mexico border, the television cameras invite spectators to participate in the operation of the panoptic machine. Furthermore, as seen through the actions of vigilante groups working along the border, such as the Minutemen Civil Defense Council’s 2008 invitation to participate in their annual “Muster”, any individual can operate the panoptic machine in order to exercise (or attempt to exercise) power and control over the U.S.-Mexico border.

Border Wars also has a didactic function, where the filmed agent’s descriptions of their surveillance techniques teach viewers how to do the work of the Border Patrol agent. This is made evident in the Border Wars web-game “You are a Border Agent”. In this game, the player assumes the part of the agent and responds to different field scenarios, further directing spectators to adopt the gaze of the agent and to re-create his or her active performances. The hyper-visibility of the agent’s performances on the TV show and the web-game invite spectators to not only identify with the agents, but serve as sites that invite spectators to actively participate in the militarization of society—reproducing low intensity conflict through the participation of civilian populations in the extension of the military security apparatus.

Wherein Border Wars makes visible a number of nighttime operations, viewers are

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49 The Minutemen Civil Defense Corps is a national organization with state chapters, whose mission is: “to secure United States borders and coastal boundaries against unlawful and unauthorized entry of all individuals, contraband, and foreign military”. In 2008, The Minutemen Civil Defense Corps website, specifically within the Border Operations section of their website: (http://www.borderops.com/index.php) invited people to participate in the annual April muster, titled “Operation Sovereignty 2008”.

50 It should be noted that when I played the game, I was always most successful when I assumed the most dangerous of the scenarios provided, reminding us that structured play rarely exists in a political vacuum.
able to observe, and participate in the panoptic project by “riding along” with the agents. The veil of darkness and infrared and night vision equipment provides the agents with the panoptic ability to see without being seen. Unlike the prison-panopticon where the inmate is aware of the point of observation, the border crosser is seemingly unable to see these points of observation. However, similar to the prison-panopticon, the border crosser is aware of the threat of observation and subsequent consequences that result from being observed. We are also told that drug smugglers utilize similar look out points, particularly near Baboquivari mountain in Arizona, and that the more sophisticated smuggling organizations also use radios and night-vision equipment.

Like the panopticon described by Foucault, the surveillance-control-and-punishment triad made visible in *Border Wars* also aims to isolate the migrant crosser to brand him or her as an “IA”, illegal alien, or “UDA”, drug smuggler and even potential terrorist. However, it should be noted that the images of apprehended immigrants seem to belie these claims as they show mostly people who appear exhausted, submissive and not dangerous. The images of unarmed men with bales of marihuana are also not particularly menacing, yet are used frequently.

The panoptic triad of surveillance, control and punishment outlined in “Panopticism” as filmed in *Border Wars* assist in the branding of border crossers, creating a binary distinction between the “non-criminal citizen”, who adopts the surveillant gaze, and the “criminal-border crosser”. The branding and quarantining studied by Foucault is also reproduced in *Border Wars* in the “City under Siege” episode that features a segment the quarantine area of the detention center during the swine flu
outbreak, signaling that migrants also pose a threat to the physical health of U.S. citizens.

Furthermore, by emphasizing the “pacific utility” of the panoptic surveillance structure, as exemplified in the drone scene, *Border Wars* effectively excludes both the real violence produced by drones as well as the military industrial complex’s role in crafting and profiting from the border war scenario. As Todd Miller writes in his article “The University of Arizona’s Border War: Follow the Money”, “with the Iraq war winding down, military contractors looking to boost their profits have turned to the U.S.-Mexico border as a fresh market for their products” (23). Miller traces funding and development of military technologies and how military contractors, such as Aria International, have simultaneously adapted to and participated in the crafting of the “U.S.-Mexico Border War” so as to secure future funding. Miller finds that companies such as Aria International Inc., a company that outfitted ‘aircraft and drones for surveillance operations in the Iraq war’ (23) have moved their operations to Arizona because “Department of Homeland Security (DHS) contracts for border enforcement are now the most lucrative” (23).

This big business relies upon a public’s willingness, and/or blindness, for funding. Along these lines, every time that *Border Wars* makes visible the constant state of failure and success of security forces along the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as the “utility” of its war craft, it is ultimately doing the promotional work of the private military contractor.

As we see in S1:E1 “Last Defense”, the opening sequence matches a variety of quick action shots and close shots of drugs with the description of the “war”. As the voice over explains to viewers:
These officers and agents of The Department of Homeland Security work around the clock protecting America’s borders. They’re the frontline in a non-stop war against drug trafficking, illegal immigration and terrorism. In the next 24 hours they will uncover a secret stash of money […] they will race to save a group of illegal immigrants facing death in the desert. […] And rescue two little girls being smuggled illegally into the U.S.

The accompanying imagery includes the medium shot of the two twin girls, described earlier, as well as a medium shot of Oscar Peru, one of the “stars” of season one, with whom viewers are invited to identify. In this shot Officer Peru is holding an “iv” bag over a migrant who is lying on the ground, so as to make visible the “rescue” component of the officer’s job description and low intensity conflict profile.

As the language indicates, *Border Wars* makes visible a “non-stop” war with “no end in sight”. As De Genova (*Working the Boundaries*) indicates, Mexican migration is often used to signify the U.S. nation-state’s “loss of border control” and therefore is employed as evidence for the continued escalation of militarization of the U.S. – Mexico border. Following De Genova, I find that the excessive cooperation of the state agencies in the production of the televised spectacles that are *HSUSA* and *Border Wars*, not only participate the production and fomentation of Low Intensity Conflict, as described by Dunn, through the promotion of civil and military interaction, but also signals the Homeland Security State’s desire to portray its actions as necessary and effective, and to thereby ensure current and future funding.
As outlined in chapter one, Peter Andreas’ *Border Games: The Policing of the U.S.-Mexico Divide*, signals how the “loss of control” narrative employed by the State, and visually demonstrated in *Border Wars*, effectively renders invisible ‘the degree to which the state has actually structured undocumented immigration’ while also ‘overstating the degree to which the state has been able to control the border in the past’ (7). Andreas emphasizes how this narrative in particular obfuscates how the U.S. state has actively structured the socio-economic as physical-geographic conditions that engender demands for increased militarization.

In particular, Andreas highlights that the “loss of control” narrative portrays the U.S. state as “reactive”. This is essentially the central element of *Border Wars*—The repeated visualization Border Patrol agents’ techniques and behaviors that respond to the myriad and “never ending” threats. While Andreas focuses on how the U.S. state brings about these conditions through legal channels, he also argues that the media plays a key role in bringing about these perceptions. Andreas however does not focus his study the mediatized representation of this “border game”. Andreas provides an important perspective for viewing Border Wars, in particular the filming of the daily performances and “failures” of Border Patrol agents. *Border Wars* plays a special role in the “border game” by emphasizing the visible security successes and failures, the program relegates to the shadows the State’s structural role in inducing these conditions, making it seemingly invisible.

Diana Taylor’s notion of percepticide, outlined in *Disappearing Acts*, and reviewed in greater detail in chapter one, is particularly useful for critically viewing what
*Border Wars* makes visible and seemingly invisible. Wherein percepticide is described by Taylor as the act of making the visible seemingly invisible through the “self-blinding of the general population” (*Disappearing Acts* 123), *Border Wars* participates in this blinding by inviting spectators to view the U.S.-Mexico border and migrations from the narrow lens of the security agent. From this perspective, the U.S. demand for disposable labor is not addressed and subsequently disappeared in the security scenario, which following Taylor, makes it resistant to critique. The spectator must actively imagine how these images index a broader economic patterning that is not made visible.

Andreas also argues that the focus on security obscures the symbiotic relationship between border securitization and the further development of the clandestine border economy, where for every increase in security there is an equal increase in the organization of smuggling operations. However, in S1:E2 “City under Siege” *Border Wars* focuses the episode on the Nogales sector and films various examples of how alleged smuggling operations in Nogales, Sonora increase and develop their own surveillance and crossing tactics in response to U.S. security in Nogales, AZ. In similar fashion, we are also shown how the Border Patrol attempts to “keep up” and “stay ahead” of these organizations. In this case, *Border Wars* visualizes the border game for spectators. One of the problems, as we are shown through aerial shots is that Nogales, Sonora is physically higher than Nogales, Arizona, and its hills offer smugglers a visual vantage point from where they can monitor the movement and shifts of Border Patrol agents. In this case, the smugglers utilize invert the panoptic structure and weaken the traditional viewing arsenal of the Border Patrol.
However, I find that this episode ultimately serves to further advocate for increasing technical innovations on the U.S. side of the border, such as ground sensors, night vision and drones, all of which we see visual examples of throughout the first season. In the case of the “City under Siege” episode, the symbiotic relationship between securitization and the organization of the clandestine border economy is not disappeared, but is used to visually signal, and to provoke imagination of the ever-increasing threats that are constantly developing in Mexico.

As Andreas also argues that when border security is neither effective nor efficient, as shown in Border Wars in the “agent McClafferty” scene, or could be argued of the “City under Siege” episode, its ceremonial performance asserts the importance of the border security scenario, in which the border serves as the stage on which migrant illegality and deportability are made visible, and the performance of the state agent maintaining sovereignty can be observed. Again, we see in Border Wars, and HSUSA that the cooperation of the state agencies in the production of the televised border security spectacle, demonstrates the U.S. state’s desire to portray its actions, particularly the upholding of sovereignty, as necessary and effective. As Andreas argues, “‘successful’ border management depends on successful image management, […] the escalation of border policing has been less about deterring than about image crafting” (9). Wherein the Homeland Security State and the policing of the U.S.-Mexico border use surveillance as a principal armament, of course in concert with the threat of deportation, detention and removal, the televised production of the security spectacle ultimately produces what Mirzoeff calls the “convergence of spectacle and surveillance” (267).
“The Shadow Wolves: Border Warriors”: The Border Spectacle on the Tohono O’odham Frontier

The sixth and final episode of the Border Wars first season was titled the “Shadow Wolves: Walk the line” featuring the Tohono O’odham nation’s equivalent of ICE agents. In this episode, the frontier scenario is reactivated and used as the staging ground for the detention and removal spectacle. While McGivney and Bowden, studied in chapter one, do not make mention of the Tohono O’odham Nation, that shares borders with the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, the Cabeza Prieta and Mexico, an unsurprising erasure given their frontier narratives, Border Wars dedicated an entire episode in its first season to the “border issues” of the Tohono O’odham nation, but then strangely removed the episode from circulation. I originally viewed the episode on HULU, but it has been removed from the season one offerings on HULU, and, more importantly, is no longer listed as a season one episode on the show’s website, and is not included on the season one or season two DVDs. When searching for the episode in 2011 and 2012 it had been effectively been disappeared from cyber-space with the exception of a couple of buried clips on the show’s website. Nonetheless, this episode offers an exquisite visualization of the frontier scenario and the detention and removal spectacle.

This episode focuses solely on the tracking and detention of drug smugglers and the confiscation of bales of marijuana. There are few references to undocumented migrants and the migrants that have died on Tohono O’odham land. The episode also

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52 I was able to obtain a copy of the episode from the film production company. In the spring of 2013, I discovered that the show now exists as a two-episode special series focused solely on the Shadow Wolves. I have found a webpage with information about the show, but I am unable to locate full-episodes on the NatGeo website. See <http://natgeotv.com/uk/shadow-wolves-border-warriors/about>.
starts by showing bloody images from the drug war in Mexico, and after stating that ten thousand have died in Mexico, the voice over and images of drug confiscations also tell viewers that this bloody drug war threatens to invade “The Promised Land”.

The “Shadow Wolves” episode focuses in particular on the high-skilled abilities of the indigenous defenders of the nation to track “the bad guys”, capturing the agents demonstrating how they “cut for sign” and describe the damage that drug runners do to their environment. Despite the fact that these tend to be the same methods we see the other non-indigenous Border Patrol agents use in the other Border Wars episodes, the audio combination of flutes, rattles, chanting and voice over signals to viewers that these are traditional methods were used originally to track prey, but are now employed to catch the “bad guys”. Viewers are also shown and told that the Shadow Wolves teach their techniques to other ICE agents and their military counterparts abroad. In a couple of brief shots we see the Shadow Wolves training military personnel in what I deduce from other research to be Pakistan.53

In addition to the repetition of the familiar forms of the security scenario, these scenes also visualize what Homi Bhabha refers to in The Location of Culture as colonial mimicry, and a “desire for a reformed, recognizable other” (86). Not only are Shadow Wolves doing the work of the State on Tohono O’odham land, they are willing and able to transfer their skills to the War on Terror. However, in contrast to the Bhabha model, in the Shadow Wolves example we observe an inter-directionality among the traits that are acquired by the colonized and colonizer, where the skills of the colonized are used to

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53 Mark Wheeler’s Smithsonian article on the Shadow Wolves, listed on the Kris Eggle website, describes in more detail how the Shadow Wolves have trained agents in Pakistan and Uzbekistan.
carry out additional neo-imperial projects in the theaters of war in the Middle East. The Shadow Wolves, are crafted as almost the same as the other Latino and Anglo Border Patrol agents that we see in *Border Wars*, but not quite, as we are told and shown though the emphasis on their “traditional skills”, in combination with the music.

The visible and voiced anchors not only re-cast these acts of neo-imperial violence as necessary defense, simultaneously erasing the more problematic hegemonic relations between the U.S., and Mexico, or in the Middle East, but also distract from the colonial relations between the U.S. and the Tohono O’odham peoples.

In the episode, the Shadow Wolves are geographically situated by a visual of a map that demarcates the tribal lands of the Tohono O’odham nation, limiting it at the Mexico border and failing to mention or show that the Tohono O’odham territory and communities extend across the border into Mexico. However, in a combination of chanting and voice over we are told that the Tohono O’odham nation is “ground zero for some of the most dangerous drug and human trafficking routes into the United States”.

To define the Tohono O’odham nation in such terms, and through this particular geographic lens, together performs what Joseph Pugliese calls the double logic of historicide, wherein the erasure of state sponsored terrorism against Native Americans clears the ground for what is then described as the first and worst threats to U.S. sovereignty. Pugliese notes that Trevor Paglen studies “non-sites”, or sites that are hidden geographies, officially left off maps, such as U.S. military installments and testing grounds on traditional Shoshone land in Nevada, or black sites abroad. As Pugliese notes, Shoshone activist Carrie Dann argues that these military sites effectively constitute the
illegal occupation of Native American land by the U.S. state, which she signals is ultimately the performance of domestic terrorism, or what Pugliese describes as ‘the power to create geographies and to do so with impunity’. Wherein the War on Terror ultimately legitimates the occupation of native lands abroad, such as the territories in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq, especially through the use of armed drones, what is disappeared in the “Shadow Wolves” episode is how the war on terror ultimately further legitimates the occupation of native lands in the U.S., both historically and presently, all the while showing us how Native American’s are used abroad to aid in The War on Terror, or as Pugliese sees it, the U.S. power to create new geographies through invasion and with impunity.

While the show focuses on the active skills of the Shadow Wolves and the damage caused by drug smugglers, as do the majority of the *Border Wars* episodes, there is no mention of the divisions or hardships caused by the geopolitical border nor its increased militarization, such as the economic burden of rescues, health care and recovery of human remains. In spite of this elision, opposing views of the relationship between the Tohono O’odham and the United States’ border policies are not hard to find, as they are part of the local discourse. In fact, of the seven paragraphs on the “History and Culture” page of the Tohono O’Odham website, three focus directly on the difficulties the militarization of the border and U.S. immigration policies produce for the Tohono O’odham communities. In particular, the webpage indicates that U.S. immigration laws prevent the O’odham from crossing freely, “impairing their ability to collect foods and materials needed to sustain their culture and to visit family members
and traditional sacred sites.” The webpage also states “O'odham members must produce passports and border identification cards to enter into the United States.” Furthermore, the page states

On countless occasions, the U.S. Border Patrol has detained and deported members of the Tohono O'odham Nation who were simply traveling through their own traditional lands, practicing migratory traditions essential to their religion, economy and culture. Similarly, on many occasions U.S. Customs have prevented Tohono O'odham from transporting raw materials and goods essential for their spirituality, economy and traditional culture.

In spite of these readily available published complaints, and the ultimate erasure of Tohono O’odham signifying systems of membership, there is no mention or representation of these opposing visions in the now disappeared “Shadow Wolves” episode, thereby performing a gesture of silence to those who are in fact, not silent; Making visible the embodied performances of the state project while effectively disappearing other visions of O’odham membership and dissention.

Instead, the “Shadow Wolves” episode, like most Border Wars episodes focuses on the active security spectacle performed by the Shadow Wolves and the detention of drug smugglers. There are two detainment scenes in which Mexican men are detained and suspected of smuggling. In the first, we are told that the bales of marihuana found in the proximity them were too far away to legally convict them of smuggling and therefore
that they will be detained and deported. In the second, the drugs are close-by and we are told the man may go to prison.

In this episode, like the others, *Border Wars* focuses on drug smuggling and its overall spectacle of detention and removal works to conflate migrants with the drug and human smugglers. It also constructs the U.S.-Mexico border as a war zone and frontier space. However in the Shadow Wolves frontier, the menacing other that was traditionally envisioned as the Native American is now the Mexican smuggler and migrant, simultaneously mining and erasing the frontier scenario for signs. *Border Wars* redevelopment of the frontier scenario on Tohono O’odham land is an ultimate testament to the portability and transferability of the scenario as described by Taylor. In the case of the Shadow Wolves frontier, the native agents are the authorized protectors of the land, which subsequently becomes the staging ground for the spectacle of detention and removal, and ultimately serves to advocates for further militarization. As we are told in the “Shadow Wolves” episode, “life out here is cheap to drug cartels, who murder people every week in a frenzied quest for market share. Ask the people who work the borderline every day. They know it’s simply a matter of time until the hunters becomes the hunted,” referring to the violent behavior of drug smugglers and their potential to “hunt” security agents on the U.S. side of the border.

While the political and economic factors influencing and shaping migration, smuggling and overall cross-border lives and economies, such as NAFTA, are rarely addressed and never analyzed in depth in these visual spectacles. As the “Shadow Wolves” episode makes visible, the violence of colonization is also erased so as to make
the neo-imperial project of militarized control of the borderlands seem both exceptional and necessary. Through these imaginations, nativist and neoliberal discourses reveal their working relationship in these popular discourses, particularly in their denial of imperial projects.

Conclusion

On more than one occasion in *Border Wars* when Border Patrol agents are interviewed in what I would call “the end of the day reflection,” often featured at the end of an episode, agents express their compassion for the plight of the migrant who is searching for a better life. In these scenes, like the one in the first episode, the agent explains that he does not regret doing his job, because his job is to protect this great nation, and it is also not his job to decide. Furthermore, at the end of the day he can sleep well because he knows he’s protected the country from terrorism, narco-traficking human smuggling and illegal immigration.54

This commentary demonstrates the power of the neoliberal dispositif, outlined in the introduction, and nativist discourse. Per neoliberalism, a belief system and hegemonic discourse grounded in privatization, personal responsibility, individualism and competition, all failures, poverty, and hardships are imagined as the result of individual actions, and are not understood as resulting from larger systematic socio-economic processes. Meanwhile, the State functions to induce market profitability, as evidenced in the production of the condition of deportability. The visual spectacle of border security

54 Bowden captures a similar sentiment in his article: "‘Sometimes I feel sorry for the Mexicans,’ says Bryan Tomlinson, 45, a custodial engineer for the Bisbee school district. His brother Don chimes in, ‘But the wall’s a good thing’” (3).
and detention and removal invites the spectator to view the embodied performance of neoliberalism, and nativism of the security agents, who maintain and reproduce the conditions in the borderlands through force, and to ignore, or rather to not see, the more complex machinations of the neoliberal *dispositif*.

For example, the hyper-visibility of security obscures the more complicated and inhumane elements of the detention and removal process as evidenced in Nina Rabin’s report *Unseen Prisoners: A Report on Women in Immigration Detention Facilities in Arizona*. This report sheds light on the aspects of the detention and removal process that apparently did not make the cut for any *Border Wars* episode, such as the lengthy imprisonment of immigrants awaiting deportation and deportation hearings. Rabin’s report lists the following as problems faced by women detainees in Arizona that require immediate government attention: “The denial of adequate medical care”; “Failure to recognize the mental health needs of women detainees”; “Mixing women immigration detainees with people serving criminal sentences”; “Family Separation”; “Inadequate access to telephones and legal materials”; “Severe penal conditions for women who are not serving criminal sentences”; And “[a]gressive government persecution and detention of women who pose no security threat or flight risk” (i-iii).

While not addressed in Rabin’s study, in the televised spectacle of detention and removal, we also do not bear witness to immigrants giving birth in chains, the precarious conditions into which migrants are deported, children stripped of their rights to be parented by their migrant parents or the deportation of minors who are U.S. citizens. The spectator is invited to see the deportable, detainable and removable migrant, but is
actively blindered from seeing what the larger processes of deportation, detention and removal actually look like.

By highlighting the border security spectacle, these sites of popular visual culture make visible the technologies and militarized realizations of policies like *Operation Endgame*, the militarized arm of NAFTA, while simultaneously disappearing the states of exception that studies like the Rabin report reveals, and encouraging percepticide of the “neoliberal exception,” that as Ong describes it, “pries open the seam between sovereignty and citizenship, generating successive degrees of insecurity for low-skilled citizens and migrants who will have to look beyond the state for the safeguarding of their rights” (19).

Taylor proposes a strategy of critical witnessing for resisting percepticide, in which the spectator observes, records and reports violence that has made to seem invisible. Following Taylor, I conclude that the border security spectacle of detention and removal calls for a critical witnessing on the part of many resistant spectators who must take up the responsibility of critically viewing, listening, remembering and reporting what he or she experiences, making visible that which has been rendered invisible by the spectacle.

In the concluding chapter, I use Taylor’s notion of critical witnessing as a starting point to view how the realization of the detention and removal process, as embodied in the Postville, Iowa workplace raid of 2008 relied on both its visibility and its invisibility to produce ever greater states of fear and heighten the sense of deportability among migrants. In particular, the Postville Raid, like other raids in the interior, serves to
broaden the condition of deportability to also encompass detainability. I investigate how particular elements of the detention and removal process were obscured by the U.S. state, and how those were met and challenged by critical witnesses, including filmmakers and federal court interpreters.

I am particularly interested in how the Postville raid attempted to cull migrant laborers, many of whom are of indigenous decent from Guatemala, from terrorists, to use De Genova’s terminology (“Culprits”), under the guise of The Homeland Security State apparatus, literally herding the migrants in groups of ten, in chains, into the Iowa Cattle Congress expo buildings in Waterloo, Iowa. While those images were hidden from the public, they became visible through the critical witnessing of Federal Court Interpreter Erik Camayd-Freixas, who broke the sanctioned code of silence and made his witnessing available to the public, opening the spectacle of detention and removal to resistance and critique. Subsequently, I examine how documentary television and film, such as Luis Argueta’s AbUSed: The Postville Raid serves as a site of critical witnessing, rendering visible that which has otherwise been disappeared and/or obscured by the spectacle of detention and removal in Border Wars.

In my next chapter, “Screening Nafta”, I shift my analytical lens to examine how the U.S.-Mexico neoliberal relation in its Mexican context, in particular the unfolding of neoliberalism in relation to borders and migration, is visualized in two films staged in Mexico. As this project critically examines visual discourses of the U.S. and Mexican borders, I find that the films Sin dejar huella and Sleep Dealer are two objects of visual culture that merit analysis given their explicit and implicit references to and
representations of Mexico’s borders in relation to the North American neoliberal project. Just as I examine in the first two chapters how visual narratives produced in the U.S. do real and constitutive work relative to borders, migration and citizenship and I find that these objects of visual culture do particular kinds of work, namely the re-production of a frontier scenario and the deployment of a spectacle of detention and removal, in my next two chapters, I examine visual narratives that are not told from the perspective of the U.S. State. In order to investigate how the human side of borders and migrations is imagined in visual culture, I look to filmic and televised narratives that attempt to visualize the human side of the neoliberal dispositif.
CHAPTER THREE: SCREENING NAFTA: BORDERS, MIGRATION, FLEXIBLE CITIZENSHIP AND NEOLIBERALISM IN MEXICAN FILM

What neoliberalism is and looks like in Mexico depends on one’s perspective. These diverse vantage points produce distinct narratives that capture and describe Mexican experiences in the neoliberal dispositif. Similarly, what neoliberalism looks like on screen also depends on the director’s imaginary and the spectator’s viewing position. As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo writes in her article “In the Shadow of NAFTA: Y tu mamá también Revisits the National Allegory of Mexico”, what the Mexican elite view as “Mexico’s entry into ‘democratic capitalism’”, the Zapatistas describe as ‘the sacrifice of the subaltern’s present to the nation’s future’ (751). As Saldaña-Portillo finds, these opposing narratives exist not only within the sphere of public political discourses, but are also visually captured in Alfonso Cuarón’s 2001 film Y tu mamá también. In similar fashion to Saldaña-Portillo’s analysis of Cuarón’s film, this chapter examines how neoliberalism, and in particular the human elements of neoliberal political economy and governmentality, are visually represented in the Mexican filmic context. This chapter asks, what does the unfolding of neoliberalism in Mexico look like? How is it visually captured and translated to the screen? And how is the human side of the neoliberal dispositif imagined and problematized? If the North American neoliberal dispositif has driven people to migrate, then how are these migrations treated, imagined and registered in visual discourses?

55 Examples of formants of these discourses would be state official’s public descriptions and discussions of neoliberal state-private sector practices, and Zapatista communiqués.
In particular, this chapter studies how two films cinematographically address neoliberalism in Mexico: *Sin dejar huella* (2000) written and directed by María Novaro, and *Sleep Dealer* (2008) written by Alex Rivera and David Riker and directed by Rivera. It is worth noting that these films were chosen precisely because of their direct aim at the topics centered in this dissertation, namely migration and borders within a neoliberal framework. These films are staged and filmed predominantly in Mexico. As Rivera is a U.S.-based filmmaker, this chapter recognizes the transnational nature, and lens, of these films and therefore, looks beyond the Mexican national cinema frame, focusing on how these films represent the challenges of neoliberal economics, migrations and national sovereignties in both their Mexican contexts. That said this chapter also dialogs with similar analyses of Mexican cinema, with regards to NAFTA.

This chapter aims to examine the kinds of representative and constitutive these films do in the frame of (or name of) neoliberalism? Therefore, within this analysis I also pay particular attention to how Mexico’s Northern and Southern borders and regions are constructed in each film? Given my study’s emphasis on migration in relation to neoliberalism, I also explore how each film imagines Nations, citizens, sovereignties, territorialities, migrants and non-citizens, especially as they intersect with race, ethnicity and gender. Given these contexts, I analyze how Novaro and Rivera construct critical

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56 If I were to broaden my context from predominantly Mexico to North America, particularly US-Mexico, Sergio Arua’s 2004 *A Day without a Mexican* and Richard Linklater’s’ (2006) *Fast-Food Nation* are two other films that could easily fit into this body of work. Linklater’s is a filmic adaptation of Eric Schlosser’s (2001) book by the same name.

visual imaginations of neoliberalism and migration through Mexico, and in particular, how do they visualize possible resistance, disruptions and/or alternatives to neoliberalism in its Mexican context?

As this chapter analyzes these films in relation to neoliberalism and NAFTA, I therefore pay particular attention to the ways in which the directors filmically portray the elements of the neoliberal dispositif, and their realizations in space, time and society. As was outlined in the introduction, the neoliberal dispositif, not only includes in its significations a body of economic reforms, but also refers to the reorganization of the state-market relationship, and importantly, it carries with it new governmentalities and rationalities, that erode and/or re-arrange the political-democratic institutions and their relationships to citizen-subjects. Following Wendy Brown, I argue that the neoliberal dispositif includes an emerging neoliberal rationality that incites both citizen-subjects and institutions to organize themselves along the terms of rational market behavior. Similarly, following Saldaña-Portillo, I am also looking to see how the human elements that have been either sacrificed, forsaken and intentionally included through their simultaneous interpolation and exclusion in neoliberal programs, are signaled and captured by these filmmakers.

In his chapter “City Future in City Past: Balzac’s Cartographic Imagination” in After-Images of the City, David Harvey posits that artistic culture and production, in the case of his study, literature, can play key roles in understanding current socio-economic organization in space and time, as well as spaces for imagining alternative futures for a society. Harvey follows Marx, (both studying the works of Balzac) in this regard who
suggests that these ideological forms serve as spaces of consciousness for negotiating alternatives and future directions. Harvey also suggests that he is following the work of theorists like Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and Fredric Jameson wherein they look to cultural productions, not as separate from politics and socio-economic life, but as both sources of and manifestations of economic and political being and belonging. Harvey examines the works of Balzac in order to study how the author reflected on and composed urban life. The “architectural imagination”, as Harvey refers to it, “provides a space in which alternative urban possibilities can be formulated and, perhaps, acted upon” (24 “City Future”). As Harvey writes of 19th century writers and their architectural and cartographic imaginaries:

They considered alternatives and possibilities, sometimes didactically (Eugene Sue, for example), more often indirectly, by evoking the play of human desires in relation to social forms, institutions, and conventions. They helped make the city legible and provided ways to grasp, represent, and mold seemingly inchoate and often disruptive processes of urbanization to human wants, needs and desires (26).

Following Harvey’s arguments about the possibility of artistic interventions via their imaginations, this study examines how Novaro and Rivera use the cinematic medium to participate in, or perhaps intervene in, ongoing conversations and representations of what Aihwa Ong refers to as the “neoliberal exception”\textsuperscript{58}. \textit{Sin dejar huella} and \textit{Sleep Dealer}
have important differences and share similarities with the other objects of visual culture produced in the U.S., that I examine in the previous chapters. At the most basic level, these films differ greatly from the magazines and television programs studied in the first two chapters here, because they are narrative films positioned in Mexico and filmed mostly in Spanish. In terms of their form and function, these two films interrogate and make visible with much greater detail the motivations and socio-economic factors for migration in and through Mexico and/or immigration to the U.S. and/or centers of greater capitalist production. The genre differences themselves underscore that this is not a comparative project but rather an exploration and study of the visual culture of immigration and the U.S.-Mexico relation in the frame of NAFTA.

How each film represents, reproduces and/or dialogs with particular filmic genres is also insightful for reading each film. While each film falls broadly into the genre of migration film, *Sleep Dealer* employs science fiction, which is always already a genre that deals with imagining possible futures and human organizations, to imagine the near future; and *Sin dejar huella* uses the road movie genre while clearly dialoging with both

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war in Mexico, noting that the largely simplified discourse produced by the Mexican government and the mainstream media on the violence in Mexico is predominantly “Manichaean and one-dimensional, […] in effect arguing that the resulting violence is an affair between criminals.” Gutiérrez signals that Mexican cinema, on the other hand, is attempting to capture the broader complexities of the “narco-war” while also representing narco-culture, whose signs have been condemned and censored by the Mexican government. Gutiérrez brings forth that in addition to the physical violent struggles in Mexico, there is also an important struggle over the representation of the terms, roots, directions and possible solutions to the “drug war”. Cinema, Gutiérrez argues, is attempting to participate in this conversation, and doing so “in more interesting terms”. As Gutiérrez signals, “These films offer diverse and variegated depictions of the narco for the mainstream, art-house, and B-movie realms, drawing from both fiction and non-fiction narratives. Looking at these films, it becomes evident that filmmakers have sought creative ways to represent the drug war and its impact on different political, financial, and social registers”.(http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-miserica-82/gutierrez)
narco cinema and traditional Mexican melodrama, inverting the patriarchal structure of all three genres.

This chapter dialogs with Saldaña-Portillo’s article mentioned above, as the films studied here could also be said to form part of a larger cinematic discourse on the effects of neoliberalism in Mexico. In her analysis of Alfonso Cuarón’s film, she argues that *Y tu mamá también* is much more than a simple coming-of-age road movie for the two male protagonists whose homo-erotic desires for one another are realized in traditional narrative fashion through the body of a woman. By carefully reading the film’s structure, and in particular the use of “interstitial scenes that interrupt the filmic text” (752), Saldaña-Portillo argues that these scenes are in fact the filmic “irruption of the subaltern onto the scene of masculine nationalism” as embodied in the relationship between the two male protagonists (752). Saldaña-Portillo also outlines the economic statistics used to measure NAFTA’s economic impact in Mexico and argues that these economic indicators, to which NAFTA’s “success” is attributed, represent a “fiction of development”, wherein these numerical measurements fail to account for those displaced under neoliberalism and “the transformation in the lives of millions of Mexican subalterns” (759). As she argues, the growth in foreign direct investment attributed to NAFTA fails to demonstrate the effects of neoliberalism on what she refers to as the “national political imaginary”. Saldaña-Portillo further writes:

For NAFTA, I suggest, as the fulcrum of neoliberalism, has wrought the biggest change to the conception of Mexican national sovereignty since the Mexican revolution of 1910. Indeed, in some ways it is the tangible
result of seventy long years of legal counterinsurgency waged by U.S. and Mexican elites against the socialist principles enshrined in the Mexican constitution of 1917. To detect these changes in the everyday lives of subalterns and in the political imaginary of a nation, one must turn to either the ethnographic, literary, or filmic text, which, while it cannot deliver ‘the truth of the matter,’ can nevertheless register these richer cultural and political transformations. (759 my emphasis)

Saldaña-Portillo thus finds Cuaron’s *Y tu mamá también* to be one interpretation of human price of neoliberal development. Like that of the Zapatista’s reading of neoliberalism, Cuarón’s film visualizes, in its interstitial scenes, those whose present is sacrificed for the nation’s future.

Given my study’s emphasis on the portrayal of neoliberal capitalism in visual culture, I find that David Harvey’s concept of the urbanization of capital provides a key theoretical lens through which to view these films. In *The Urban Experience*, Harvey describes the urbanization of capital as the process through which capitalism reproduces itself through urbanization, or the organization of space and the built environment, including the arrangements of labor and the loci of urban consciousness across space (54). While Harvey focuses on the urbanization of capital, I extend Harvey’s arguments about the urbanization of capital in order to refer to these processes as more broadly the capitalization of space. In other words, I find that Harvey’s analysis of the organization of urban space under capitalism can be extended to the organization of both urban and rural spaces under capitalism. Harvey describes the process in the following terms:
Capitalist urbanization occurs within the confines of the community of money, is framed by the concrete abstractions of space and time, and internalizes all the vigor and turbulence of the circulation of capital under the ambiguous and often shaky surveillance of the state. *(229 The Urban Experience)*

Per Harvey, the built environment is the result of the accumulation of capital in space, and therefore we must interrogate how “communities of money” are organized, and imagined. “Urbanization has always been about the mobilization, production, appropriation, and absorption of economic surpluses” *(The Urban Experience 53)*.

Along these lines, I also analyze how each film represents what Harvey refers to as the formants of urban consciousness, or “five primary loci of power and consciousness formation” “class, family, individual, state, community” in relation to the capitalization of space *(The Urban Experience 231)*. By studying how these films represent and address the formants of urban consciousness, their interrelations and the urbanization of capital, I am following Harvey’s path of analysis, wherein he argues that all of the formants must be considered interdependent:

The task for historical materialist interpretation of the urban process is, therefore, to examine how the ways of seeing, thinking and acting produced through the interrelations between individualism, class, community, state, and family affect the paths and qualities of capitalist urbanization that in turn feedback to alter our conceptions and our actions. *(231 The Urbanization of Capital)*
To Harvey’s categories of loci of power and consciousness formation, I add race and gender. Just as Harvey’s five loci overlap, so too must we consider how race and gender, among other factors, also function as organizing categories and channels of difference through which capital and inequality flow and are produced. By interrogating how each film represents the formants of urban consciousness: the individual, the family, the State, community, class, as well as money and capital, we can more thoroughly analyze how these visual discourses treat the particularities of the issues they present.

Therefore, I use Harvey’s terminology as an important starting point and analytical tool for opening up a critical viewing of each film. Along these lines, I also interrogate how capitalist phenomena such as monopoly rents and the worker’s alienation from his or her production are filmed. Given that Harvey’s terminology is rooted in Marxism, it is important to note that I am not editing what I refer to as the neoliberal dispositif throughout this study, but rather also paying close attention to how these elements are filmed. In other words, I employ Foucault’s notion of dispositif, because the language captures the program and practice, of neoliberalism, understood as a hegemonic discourse that extends market values and an ethos of privatization and personal responsibility to all social institutions; recasting and pervading the relationships between sovereignties, territorialities, governments and citizenships, the neoliberal discourse entraps and drives new relationships between and constructions of States, economies, workers, citizens, non-citizens migrants, borders and sovereignties. Wherein it intersects with drives and reconfigures policies and programs and notions of governmentality, Foucault’s notion of dispositif, I argue, best captures these interrelated complexities.
Neoliberalism as the Directors Imagine It

Sleep Dealer and Sin dejar huella tend to posit their critiques in ways that bring to the surface the various elements of neoliberalism. Novaro stages neoliberalism in Mexico as an extension of capitalism and colonialism, and highlights the privatization of national resources and territories in order to bring about greater levels of transnational economic competition and investment. Along these lines, Novaro’s film could be said to visualize what Simon Springer, following Kevin Ward and Kim England, refers to as understandings of neoliberalism as “neoliberalism as policy and program” and “neoliberalism as state form”. However, Novaro does not cordon off these images from other understandings and forms, but if we were to select from Springer’s four general categories of conceptualizations of neoliberalism, these would be the two most salient in the film’s discourse. (After all, Sin dejar huella is a film, not an academic project focused on the exploration of neoliberalism as a concept.)

Neoliberalism as policy and program […] focuses on the transfer of ownership from the state or public holdings to the private sector or corporate interests, which necessarily involves a conceptual reworking of the meaning these categories hold. The understanding itself is premised on the idea that opening collectively held resources to market mediation engenders greater efficiency. The usual motifs under which such policy and program are advanced include privatization, deregulation, liberalization, depolitization, and monetarism (see Brenner & Theodore,
Neoliberalism as state form. […] neoliberalism […] as a process of transformation that states purposefully engage in to remain economically competitive within a transnational playing field of similarly minded states. This is thought to involve both a quantitative axis of destruction and discreditation whereby state capacities and potentialities are ‘rolled back’, and a qualitative axis of construction and consolidation, wherein reconfigured institutional mediations, economic management systems, and invasive social agendas centered on urban order, surveillance, immigration issues, and policing are ‘rolled out’ (see Peck, 2001; Peck & Tickell, 2002). (137 Springer)

Rivera’s Sleep Dealer also emphasizes these two conceptualizations, while placing greater emphasis on the latter “neoliberalism as state form”, wherein the film imagines the full erosion of barriers and simultaneous marriage of the state-market compact, that marks neoliberalism as a process. Given that Mexico’s accommodations for NAFTA and unfolding of NAFTA are central themes in both films, it is unsurprising that these seem to be the most predominant conceptualizations of neoliberalism as NAFTA or NAFTA as neoliberalism in these films.

Post-NAFTA Mexican Cinema

While I am not focusing on Mexican national cinema in this chapter as much as I focus on how each film portrays the unfolding of the elements of the neoliberal dispositif
in the Mexican context, and possible alternatives and paths of resistance, I nonetheless want to situate the present analysis within the current conversation of analysis regarding filmic relationships to neoliberalism in Mexico. Along with Saldaña-Portillo, Emily Hind and Ignacio Sánchez-Prado, independently study post-NAFTA Mexican Cinema, and how particular Mexican films uphold, express and/or contest neoliberal discourse.

In, “Post-NAFTA Mexican Cinema: 1998-2002” Hind argues that a number of box office hits in this time period, (1998's Sexo, pudor y lágrimas, Amores perros (1999), Y tu mamá también (2001), and El crimen del Padre Amaro (2002)) as well as the lesser-grossing film Por la libre (2000), can be described as films characteristic of what she refers to as Post-NAFTA Mexican Cinema. While rejecting the “New Mexican Cinema” label, Hind opts for this more specific label, arguing that “Post-NAFTA Mexican Cinema” shares a common set of characteristics, namely, political passivity and aggression towards a sexually transgressive foreign-European other.

Post-NAFTA film also consistently portrays corrupt Mexican authority.

[…]Even as they criticize corrupt or nonexistent authorities [including religious], post-NAFTA films largely do not back the odds for successful activism and instead portray a social stability not antagonistic to the rest of North America. In sum, post-NAFTA film courts a newfound audience with depictions of a national Mexican family and North American solidarity in reward for aggression toward Europe. (108)

Along these lines, Hind argues that the United States emerges in these films as ultimately unthreatening when compared to the European colonizing counter-part. Hind finds that
these representations are in keeping with the pro-NAFTA discourse of the period, such as that found in the promotional materials used by The Association of Mexican Businesspeople, “Consejo de la comunicación”. Hind cites how the Consejo ran a privately funded campaign to promote NAFTA in 1991, to the tune of twenty-eight million dollars, that promoted cooperation with the United States and ultimate ideological identification with the United States as and “us versus them” community, aligning the North American trade block against those outside it. Hind notes however that the same organization produced a counter-campaign in 1995 that sought to promote Mexican consumption of Mexican products, as a response to what appeared to be an over-embrace of consumption of products from the U.S. In both directions however, Hind signals that these campaigns demonstrate the emergence of a notion of a community that is connected both ideologically and commercially.

Within this context, Hind argues that post-NAFTA films do not deny that the United States exists in a colonizing relationship with Mexico, but that ultimately “a tightly knit Mexican community emerges in the background of many of these films as a sign of independent national identity” (108). Hind finds that characters such as Julio Zapata in *Y tu mamá también* and El Chivo in *Amores perros* ultimately fail to produce social change and that each films’ denouement features the restoration of the social order. *Sexo, pudor y lágrimas, Amores perros* and *Y tu mamá también*, along with *El crimen del Padre Amaro* and *Por la libre* suggest progress toward social stability and conservative retention of the status quo. The death or injury of a European- or Spanish "contaminated" character fulfills a
necessary and not especially tragic sacrifice that often facilitates this return to order. (108)

In addition to the characteristics that Hind cites as common to this group of Post-NAFTA Mexican films, she argues that films that do not tend to reproduce these characteristics were not as successful at the box-office. She cites Sergio Araú’s *Un día sin mexicanos* as a clear example of the “counter-movement of Post-Nafta U.S. friendly projects”, noting that it had mixed-reviews and much lower economic returns than the big Post-NAFTA hits that she studies. Notably, Hind does not cite Novaro’s *Sin dejar huella*, (2000) as part of this counter movement, nor does she include the film in her list of Post-NAFTA films. Given the characteristics she outlines, it is curious that Hind does not consider *Sin dejar huella* as a possible representative, either running with or against this common current.

While Hind’s reading of *Y tu mamá también* is also quite distinct from that of Saldaña-Portillo’s, namely in describing the film as ultimately politically passive as opposed to Saldaña-Portillo’s interpretation that the film is nostalgic and tragic, I want to consider how the films studied in this chapter differ from and/or align with the characteristics that Hind outlines, especially as they relate to the characteristic of “backing the odds for successful activism”. However, it should be noted that Hind and Saldaña-Portillo’s distinct interpretations depend on the viewing positions that each analyzes. Hind gives ultimate signifying power to the overall narrative and the film’s denouement, whereas Saldaña-Portillo interprets the interstitial scenes as the “real story” whose “seemingly inconsequential interruptions into the ‘plot’ insists the main action of
the film is a minor story when told against the drama of subaltern Mexico in transition” (772).

Another scholarly interpretation of the relationship between neoliberalism in Mexico and Mexican cinema is found in “Amores perros: Exotic Violence and Neoliberal Fear” by Sánchez-Prado, who argues that Alejandro González Iñárritu’s film reduces and measures crime and violence to morally conservative terms and does not attribute the graphic violence it features to political and structural factors, but rather uses the violent acts and accidents as punishment for violation of the moral code of the film, namely the preservation of the family. For Sánchez-Prado, this film fails “to articulate a truly political criticism of neoliberalism and its violence” (44), and instead aestheticizes and naturalizes violence as opposed to connecting violence with social, political and economic structures. Therefore, the fear expressed is not one of neoliberalism per se, but rather a “neoliberal fear” in the sense that violence, (that which is feared), is reduced to a resultant state of transgressions of a moral code, particularly that which values a conservative family structure and therefore punishes adultery and abandonment of the family.

In short, this narrative development, […] suggests that people are always judged in terms of a transcendental moralism that makes no allowance for circumstances. It is irrelevant here whether El Chivo’s cause is just. […] According to the movie’s moral code, there is no difference between Daniel and El Chivo. That the former leaves his family for another woman whereas the latter does so for sociopolitical reasons has no bearing on the
consideration of the fact that they both leave their families. Both characters share parallel fates. (40)

Sánchez-Prado finds that this imaginary appeals to a neoliberal aesthetic, which he describes as one that naturalizes violence, measuring it, for poor and rich alike, in moralistic terms and not political terms. For Sánchez-Prado, this naturalizing ideology of violence, which simplifies violence into a binary of modernizing civilization versus barbarism, is in line with neoliberal discourse. Of particular import for Sánchez-Prado is how *Amores perros* figures in as one among many Latin American and third-world films that were popularly received and celebrated in first-world film festivals and movie theaters, in so far as he expresses concern for what appears to be a trend of commodifying representations of Latin American violence.

*Amores perros* is the most recent version of a new form of commodification of Mexico and Latin America: the configuration of an imaginary that simultaneously appeals to the worldview held by the privileged groups that benefit from the region’s neoliberalism and to the voluntaristic politics of the progressive and pseudo-progressive sectors of Western intelligentsia, desperately searching for new ways to relate to the Third World (40).

Sánchez-Prado ultimately argues that to simplify violence along lines of morality and “to accept violence” as an identifying marker of Latin America “…implies complicity with the neoliberal agenda embedded in these discourses” (52). Sánchez-Prado then outlines how representations (read filmic), can and should address violence so as to challenge the
neoliberal code:

All references to violence should be a critique of violence, a comprehension of its profound economic, social and political roots. Above all, it is imperative to understand that what defines the Latin-American experience is a contradictory legacy of colonialism and resistance, of conflict and heterogeneity. Violence is only a by-product of these relationships: to place violence at the centre of analysis or cultural production leaves aside the central questions of our culture and leads the way to an imaginary where violence and social conflict are irrevocably naturalized. (51)

Sánchez-Prado also suggests that the depolitization of violence, that is characteristic of the neoliberal aesthetic, can also be reproduced within the academic field of cultural studies wherein it adapts to neoliberalism by failing to challenge the imperialistic and violent traits of neoliberalism, misinterpreting them as avant-garde culture.

Sánchez-Prado’s estimation of the neoliberal aesthetic parallels what Lisa Duggan refers to as the “ruse of neoliberalism” wherein as a political ideology and in state-economic forms, neoliberalism is portrayed as culturally neutral economic policy. Duggan highlights how despite such claims, neoliberalism, as policy and rationality, tends to re-arrange the state-market relationship and induce capital flows along channels of difference, which include cultural and moral values. As Wendy Brown argues, as reviewed in the introductory chapter here, neoliberal political rationality and governmentality are characterized by the immersion of the state and subjects in economic
rationality, through which both subjects and policy become evaluated in economic terms:

“Per this rationale, social policy must meet profitability tests, incite and unblock competition, and produce rational self-caring subjects. Furthermore, social policy per neoliberal political rationality “obeys the entrepreneurial principle of ‘equal inequality for all’ as it ‘multiplies and expands entrepreneurial forms with in the body social’ (Lemke 195). This is the principle that links the neo-liberal governmentalization of the state with the development of a neo-liberal social sphere and neo-liberal subjects” (Brown 7).

Along these lines we can ask, to what extent and in what terms do the films represent, lament and/or work to challenge this neoliberal economic rationality. This seems to be one of the characteristics of the middle-class aesthetic that Sánchez-Prado sees in Amores perros, namely a middle-class ideology that either recognizes and fears, or fails to recognize, that the neoliberal undertow can pull them out to sea as well. However, per this neoliberal ideology participants are induced to identify the sources of this instability and violence in threatening deviant others. After all, threatening deviant others are easily imagined and visualized, where a far reaching socio-political-economic dispositif on the other hand is terribly difficult to interpret, (as Springer’s essay makes evident) and much harder to film.

While Rivera resides in the U.S. and is not a Mexican director, in that he neither has Mexican citizenship nor accordingly can benefit from most Mexican funding for film. He nevertheless inserts himself, via Sleep Dealer, into this Post-NAFTA filmic dialog and therefore is treated accordingly.

Sánchez-Prado clearly wishes for the film to do something that is does not do.
And so we are left to ask, how is a film complicit or not with neoliberal discourse, particularly in the ways in which it imagines, or fails to imagine, the complexities of violence in relation to neoliberalism. As Amy Kaplan describes it, all violence under neoliberalism is imagined as anything but that of a result of neoliberalism and neo-imperial projects, but rather is imagined as either necessary exceptions in the case of the state or moralistic exceptions in the case of the criminal individual.

Sánchez-Prado, Hind and Saldaña-Portillo’s analysis of post-NAFTA Mexican cinema all look for moments in each film where it either, according to their perspective, fails or manages to attach diegetic events with broader socio-political structures either captured diegetically or indexed as extra-diegetic. Clearly there are points of contention and disagreement about whether or not, or to what extent, a film challenges socio-political hierarchies if it also utilizes the melodramatic structure, particularly the final reconstitution of the family in the film’s denouement. However, in what follows I attempt to view these films on their own terms and analyze what they visualize and how those visualizations imagine and contest the unfolding of neoliberalism in Mexico. Perhaps, as Saldaña-Portillo suggests of Y tu mamá también, what appears to be the “real story” only serves as a vehicle for the telling of the other “real story”. Given that Novaro and Rivera utilize the family structure of melodrama, I will also ask how this narrative structure serves them in producing what still are poignant critiques of Mexico’s relationship to NAFTA and neoliberalism. And how do they, or do they ‘back the odds for successful activism’?

Just as there is no one singular definition of neoliberalism, so too are there
divergent perspectives on how film can represent and constitute both neoliberal agendas and possible alternatives and resistances. Nonetheless, I wish to situate this chapter in dialog with the works of Saldaña-Portillo, Sánchez-Prado and Hind outlined above and argue that Sin dejar huella and Sleep Dealer make visual attempts to account for the structural violence of neoliberalism in Mexico, that when viewed as a neo-imperial project also has deep historical roots in colonialism. Furthermore, I contend that Sin dejar huella and Sleep Dealer also attempt to visualize those who are included via their exclusion and displaced by the unfolding of neoliberalism in Mexico. I find that each film crafts visual alternatives to the neoliberal dispositif, as each imagines it. Both films also treat what I view as the embodied discourse of neoliberalism, that is, in keeping with understanding neoliberalism as a dispositif, as both program and discourse, the ways in which individuals are interpolated, reproduce and/or challenge neoliberal apparatuses and discourse is also worth examining as a site for challenging and reproducing neoliberal hegemony.

I find that each film posits critical reflections on the structural factors that motivate and demarcate migrations and economic opportunities in Mexico. In particular, Novaro and Rivera take direct aim at neoliberalism in Mexico and the neoliberal relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. Wherein the re-conceptualization of the individual and the socio-political and economic structure are key elements of neoliberalism, in which individuals are imagined as, and induced to be, economic actors, how each film imagines its protagonists in relation to the State, and as economic actors, is of key importance for analyzing how each film directs its criticism.
The protagonists of *Sleep Dealer* and *Sin dejar huella*, while representative of young and poor sectors of Mexican society – Memo (Luis Fernando Peña) and Aurelia (Tiaré Scanda) respectively, are accompanied by their “partners in crime”, the middle-class protagonists Luz (Leonor Varela) and Marilú (Aitana Sánchez-Gijón). Both Luz and Marilú are figured both within and outside of Mexican belonging wherein Luz belongs to the educated global middle class and Marilú has both Spanish and Mexican citizenship, but speaks with a Castilian accent, and also fluent Yucatec Maya. These distinct national subject positions, especially in the case of *Sin dejar huella* are also important elements for the narrative’s arguments. Additionally, the class-distance between Memo and Luz and Aurelia and Marilú is signaled at various points throughout both films.

**Synopses of *Sin dejar huella* and *Sleep Dealer***

In keeping with her oeuvre, Novaro employs two female protagonists, of distinct backgrounds, much like in *El jardín del Eden*, to carry forth her feminist narrative. The road film starts at Mexico’s northern border and ends in the Yucatán peninsula. As Cynthia Steele describes it, Novaro’s cinema tends to revolve around sole female protagonists whose journeys bring them together. In this case, Aurelia and Marilú will be brought together as each negotiates their position in globalized neoliberalizing Mexico. Aurelia is the young mother of Billy and Juan. She is employed in a maquiladora in Ciudad Juárez, and per the confluence of events: namely the opportunity to steal and sell her narco-boyfriend’s (Saul) (Martín Altomaro) drugs, her fear of expanding feminicidios and her reluctance to stop breastfeeding, as the result of her terminating maternity leave, she embarks on a journey towards Cancún, where she plans to work in El Hotel Ritz, and
start a new life with her sons.

Having sold Saul’s drugs, Aurelia leaves Ciudad Juárez and makes her run for one of Mexico’s southern borders—the Maya Riviera. At a truck stop in Coahuila, she encounters Marilú, who deals in falsified classic period Mayan art. Also on the run, from the law, in particular the federal police agent, Mendizábal (Jesús Ochoa), Marilú also travels towards the Yucatán, presumably to reunite with her work-partner, the Maya artist, Heraclio Chuc (Silverio Palacios). Marilú, adorned in Guchi and Longines accessories, is college educated, carries multiple, (falsified) passports and speaks fluent Yucatec Maya. Yet she presumably carries no money and relies on Aurelia for a ride from Coahuila to the Yucatán.

As the two travel through Mexico, they escape their unidentified pursuants (either two of Mendizabal’s men or Saúl and his cousin) on a number of occasions and develop a give-and-take alliance in order to reach their destinations. However, Marilú eventually betrays Aurelia, stealing her “drug money” at the same time as Aurelia’s boyfriend catches up to her, accidentally killing Marilú’s follower, Mendizábal, and stealing Aurelia’s truck. Aurelia proceeds to Cancún, where we see her working in a hotel and living in a rundown building far from the beauty of Cancún’s beaches. Eventually, Marilú reappears, to return the money and to re-establish the relationship with Aurelia, forming a new family between the two and Aurelia’s two sons, on an isolated beach somewhere, presumably along the Yucatecan coast.

In Rivera’s dystopic near-futuristic world, the U.S.-Mexico border has been physically sealed, but the digital network connecting labor to production is open. In this
world, workers migrate to Mexico’s northern border to work in the Sleep Dealers: factories in which laborers operate machines throughout the world by plugging their physical bodies and nervous systems into the network. In this “ideal world” the third-world provides the first-world with the desired labor, without the undesired laborers.

The protagonist, Memo, is a young self-made hacker, living in Oaxaca with his family that decreasingly ekes out their living on their plot of land. The water resources surrounding Memo’s family have been expropriated and privatized by Del Rio Water, a private company that guards its dammed reserve with armed men, cameras and remotely controlled drones.

While experimenting with his hacking equipment, and eavesdropping on phone conversations, Memo unintentionally picks up the communications of drone pilots and the security forces that protect Del Rio’s assets. Upon noting the intrusion, the security company attempts to trace the source. Eventually, the security forces, based out of San Diego, California, locate Memo’s source, defining the unknown suspect as a potential “aqua terrorist”, given his providence from a region known for their water rebels. In spectacular fashion, Memo watches the T.V. reality show “Drones” in which spectators observe drone pilots on their missions to defend the private assets of Del Rio and “kill the bad guys”. Following novice pilot, Rudy Ramirez, viewers watch as Rudy locates Memo’s shack, i.e., “intercept location” destroying the building and then killing Memo’s father.

In response to the tragedy and out of necessity, Memo travels Tijuana to look for work in the sleep dealers, as a cybracero. On his journey, he meets Luz, a writer who
through her nodes uploads her memories to the network for purchase. It is revealed that Luz is also a trained coyotec, who inserts nodes into Memo’s body, allowing him to connect his nervous system to the network and selling his physical labor via the control of a construction robot in the U.S.

In what unfolds, Luz begins to collect and upload Memo’s story to Rudy, who wishes to know more about him. Eventually Rudy contacts Memo and using a combination of Luz’s technical skills, Memo’s access to the network and Rudy’s pilot skills, the three launch an attack against the Del Rio dam that had destroyed Memo’s father’s livelihood and life, destroying the dam, effectively de-privatizing the resource and returning it to communal control.

“Traigo divisas al país, es lo que hay que hacer en estos tiempos globales”: Tracing NAFTA in Sin dejar huella

Sin dejar huella addresses and produces a particular vision of neoliberalism in the Mexican context on a variety of levels. This theme is visualized throughout the film and is directly verbalized by Marilú when she is detained by the Federal Policeman Mendizábal. As she argues in defense of her profession, (dealing in falsified ancient Mayan art) “al final traigo divisas al país, que es lo que hay que hacer en estos tiempos globales. ¿Qué no Licenciado?” As the dialog suggests, participation in the global capitalist economy, that is enhancing foreign direct investment, trumps the illicit nature of trading in objects of “national patrimony”. Given NAFTA’s stated goals of facilitating trade and promoting foreign investment in Mexico, and the Mexican nation’s accommodations for NAFTA, as evidenced in constitutional amendments for example,
and Mexico’s historical accommodations to bring investment to Mexico, such as the
development of its southern and northern borders, Marilú’s description serves to signal
how Novaro will craft the filmic representation of NAFTA in Mexico. The drive to bring
investment to Mexico, in spite of the human and environmental costs it incurs, is a central
element in the visual narrative of the film, and is imagined as the newest form in a long
history of globalized economics. The scene also highlights the contradictions inherent in
neoliberalism, as Harvey (Brief History) describes them, namely the tension between
encouraging the production of homo-economicus and the contradictory state forms that
both promote and thwart individual capitalistic endeavors.

Given that Mexico’s northern border is used as the staging ground of Sin dejar huella, and as one of three key spaces in Sleep Dealer, further signifies the centrality of
Mexico’s northern border development projects in relation to the characters in each film.
Given that Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana and the maquiladora industry figure in as important
features in the narratives of both Sleep Dealer and Sin dejar huella; it is worth noting a
few details of their history. The National Border Program (Programa Nacional
Fronterizo) established in 1961 and The Border Industrialization Program in 1965 are two
of the Mexican government’s key projects for industrial and cultural development in
Northern Mexico. The first project entailed the development of industrial parks, housing,
as well as public works and museums, all of which sought to both stimulate and promote
Mexican culture and to beautify border cities. The Border Industrialization Project was
established following the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964. This project, as a
part of PRONAF further sought to develop industry, i.e. the maquiladoras, along the
northern border. Harvey ("Art of Rent") refers to these projects as urban growth machines, or "urban entrepreneurialism" a process in recent decades, as evidenced in development of the maquiladora sectors and tourist sectors in Mexico, that is marked by a "pattern of behavior within urban governance that mixes together state powers […] a wide array of organizational forms in civil society […] and private interests (corporate and individual) to form coalitions to promote or manage urban/regional development of some sort or other" (402-403 "Art of Rent").

Novaro not only indexes the most recent neoliberal accommodations and projects in Mexico, i.e. NAFTA, but rather also positions her critique of the unfolding of neoliberalism in Mexico within the broader history of capitalism in Mexico. In other words, NAFTA in Mexico, as Novaro films it, is but the latest form of a project and discourse that seeks to bring international investment to Mexico, such as the Border Industrialization and PRONAF projects. Novaro also links these development projects with Mexico’s historical development that is tracing capitalisms’ advance from the colonial haciendas to the privatization of petroleum. Novaro films this arrangement not as one that provides benefits to the general population, embodied in the protagonists, but as exacting costs from the poorest sectors of the population as well as the environment. This is captured in her imaginary of the particular places that are defined by and were developed to capture their particular monopoly rent values—from the haciendas to the PEMEX oil fields and the beaches of Cancún.

As Harvey argues, there are two central factors motivating the formation of monopoly rent: unique qualities and unique locations. Harvey uses the example of a fine
wine and its vineyard as exemplary of the factors involved in creating monopoly rents. “Monopoly rent arises because social actors can realize an enhanced income-stream over an extended time by virtue of their exclusive control over some directly or indirectly tradable item which is in some crucial respects unique and non-replicable” (395 “Art of Rent”).

Harvey notes that monopoly rent, as a key element of capitalism, nevertheless contradicts some of the basic principles of globalization. In particular, an item cannot become so unique so as to not be tradable, and by the same token, unique qualities also tend to render replications, forgeries and/or simulacra, which appropriates the monopoly rents while simultaneously lowering their value. However, it is within this contradiction that Harvey also notes that the same desires for unique qualities, even to capitalize on uniqueness allow for potential fissures in the system, or spaces of hope as Harvey refers to them, in which alternative models can be used and proposed. This however, can produce the ultimate threat to capitalism. As Harvey notes, the Basque region may be traded on indirectly, as a tourist destination per its unique characteristics, but the ETA is completely incommensurate with the overall monopoly rent program. In Sin dejar huella; this is captured in scenes that portray the northern and southern borders, particularly the maquiladora industries and the Cancún tourist space, as well as the falsified Mayan art in which Marilú deals.

Novaro positions Marilú within the phalologocentric space of the state by staging her detained in Mendizabal’s office, where he, as the strong arm of the law, and Chaparro, the lawyer, work to determine her fate. Marilú is seated as the two men revolve
around her. Through the mise-en-scene and actor movements, Marilú is positioned as the capitalist that is placed on the patriarchal national geopolitical stage. The male characters and the two large maps on the wall further signify the relationship between the power to control discourse and others via the control and demarcation of space—in which the official workings of the state as related the “lettered city” to use Angel Rama’s term are signaled. Marilú reminds Mendizábal that he had agreed to let her work in peace, also signaling both the symbiotic and parasitic relationships between legal and illegal economies and the state. Yet in a medium shot of seated Marilú, Mendizábal thrusts his pelvis against her back and reminds her that she has not kept ‘her end of the bargain’, signaling the uneven sexualized power dynamic between the two. In response, Marilú closes the Swiss army knife that she was using to file her nails, (taken from Mendizabal’s desk) foreshadowing the castrating actions to come, turning the threats’ arms against them. Marilú then gets up from her seat and as the camera follows the mens’ view of her, we see how Marilú takes control of the situation, leveling her gaze against theirs, and therefore, the discourse, taking up the task of interpreting and defining the meaning of her acts and the object she carries with her.

As she explains to the agents of the state that the ceramic piece is a Mayan female weaver from the classic period of Jaina, she drops it, sacrificing the ceramic figure that as it breaks is decapitated. In a scene rich with signification, Marilú retrieves a peso coin from the ruins of the ceramic figure. She then interprets the ruins for the men. Blowing the dust off the peso, she tells them the piece is not authentic, so they cannot charge her

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59 See Peter Andreas Border Games.
with theft of national patronage. “No es auténtica así que nada de saqueo. Yo lo llamaría más bien ‘artesanía fina de exportación’. Y traigo divisas al país. Que es lo que hay que hacer en estos tiempos globales”. Given that the juridical system is sustained and constantly adjusted based on the interpretation of written laws, Marilú works like a crafty lawyer to demonstrate how shifts in legality signify that her actions should be in fact rewarded, and not punished, per her neoliberal understanding.

Marilú is filmed as taking full advantage of her status, education, citizenships and the exchange value of a product that epitomizes the trading in monopoly rents as described by Harvey. In this way, Marilú is representative of one possible interpretation of what it means to be a Mexican woman in neoliberal Mexico, who skillfully responds to and recreates globalized capitalism in the Mexican context. The lucrative potential of the ceramic “Dama de Kopelché”, as embodied in her supposedly unique and non-reproducible pre-Hispanic characteristics, is also highly transportable and sellable, so as to yield high monopoly rents. And yet her facile disposability or fragility gestures towards the Mexican revolutionary government’s (i.e. PRI) claims of valuing mestizaje, privileging an indigenous pre-Hispanic authenticity while simultaneously devaluing and fragmenting this ideal form from the indigenous present. Just as Marilú’s clients fail to value or perhaps perceive the relationship between the pre-Hispanic “authenticity” and the indigenous present, much in the way that Tenoch’s father in Y tu mamá también adorns his house with pre-Hispanic art while serving as a PRI technocrat, Marilú’s “Dama de Kopelché” is appropriated for her monopoly value yet easily destroyed and
thrown away if necessary, indexing the Mexican government’s appropriation of indigenous and yet simultaneous disposal as needed.

As Harvey signals, the “guardians of collective symbolic and cultural capital” are museums, universities, “the class of benefactors, and the state apparatus” work to capitalize on the distinct characteristics of the objects or places, while all the while tending to exclude those sectors or individuals who are related to or even responsible for the production of such unique characteristics—individuals and sectors that can ‘raise the issue of local empowerment and even of popular and oppositional movements’ (406). On this last point however, we should note the fissure that Novaro presents here, having Marilú trading on pre-Hispanic Mayan art and not that of the present. But, the fact that the sculpture is made by Heraclio Chuc, an artist of Maya descent who speaks Maya and lives in the Yucatán, who is therefore for all intents and purposes, Maya, does not produce the monopoly value as does the artwork of a long deceased ancestor.

Novaro’s visualization of the Dama’s questionable authenticity works to signal how indigenous culture is appropriated to produce monopoly rents in Mexico. In this way Novaro also films that which Harvey argues, that the challenges of monopoly rents depends upon shifting cultural discourses: “Monopoly claims […] are as much ‘an effect of discourse’ and an outcome of struggle as they are a reflection of the qualities of the product” (401 Harvey “Art of Rent”).

Harvey also notes that another problem for monopoly rents is that the drive to produce and trade on monopoly rents also yields Disneyfication, replicas and simulacra. That is, in their simulacra work, in so far as they attempt to appropriate desirable unique
qualities while eliminating less desirable elements. This is further emphasized in the Cancún scenes. While Cancún trades on its “collective symbolic capital”: “special marks of distinction that attach to some place, which have a significant drawing power upon the flows of capital more generally” (405 “Art of Rent”), it was simultaneously constructed on illegally appropriated ejido land and tends to exclude the majority of local workers and residents from the economic benefits it produces. However, as Harvey signals, in spite of the discursive shifts and strategies, in the wine trade for example, international markets “have at their root not only the search for profit but also the search for monopoly rents” (402 “Art of Rent”) which leads to another contradiction of monopoly rents, as Harvey writes: “the most avid globalizers will support local developments that have the potential to yield monopoly rents (even if the effect of such support is to produce a local political climate antagonistic to globalization!)” (“Art of Rent” 402).

In the case of the spaces filmically captured by Novaro and Rivera, they are places that capture monopoly rents and serve to alienate workers, namely Memo and Aurelia, from their production—Mexico’s northern border, the tourist region of the Yucatán Peninsula and Oaxaca (in terms of its natural resources) are spaces in which places have been constructed to take advantage of the contradictions faced by monopoly rents, where their unique geographical positions allows them to participate in globalized capital, as opposed to against it. As they are filmed, the producers of these places have ultimately opted for greater simulacra or greater profits at the expense of greater local autonomy and uniqueness.
Marliú’s dialog in the scene in Mendizabal’s office highlights the theme of neoliberal capitalism as it is imagined by Novaro. The transnational journey of the protagonists and their movement through regions and time also contribute to the filmic imaginary of the spaces of neoliberal capitalism and the characters’ negotiation of these spaces. The road film provides Novaro with a filmic device to present a particular cartographic imaginary of Mexico, in which the relations between space and globalized capitalism are highlighted on multiple occasions. It is through this journey that Novaro is able to level her critique of what ‘the drive to bring investment to Mexico’ produces and destroys.

The U.S.-Mexico border is the first place demarcated on the filmic and geopolitical map by Novaro. Novaro highlights the economic and human relationship between the U.S. and Mexico, by filming “irregular crossings” as well as the relationship of the protagonists to the border economy. In particular, the opening scene visualizes the U.S. as the site from which foreign investment is derived. Novaro initiates the narrative with an establishing shot of a close-up of a chain-linked fence that covers the screen. A rack focus then dissolves the fence, presenting the second plane of the shot, the Sonoran desert at dawn. Just as a fence can connote barriers to the freedom of movement, the camera work serves to discursively weaken the attempt to separate spaces. A long shot then presents the first of the protagonists, Marilú, who walks towards the camera, in a pink dress pulling her suitcase behind her—her wardrobe and high heels are strangely out of place on the dirt road. When she approaches the chain-linked fence a caption signals that she is in the Sonoran desert of Arizona, U.S.A. Crossing through a hole, from
right to left on the screen, another caption indicates that she has just crossed into the same desert, but on the Mexican side. This will be the first of a number of scenes in which Novaro indicates the geo-political position of the characters through a graphic. By positioning the protagonists on the geopolitical map, Novaro begins to construct the cartographic imaginary of the film, in which the Mexican territory figures as a key element.

As we see in the first scene, the border for Marilú is permeable. While officially demarcated as signaled by the fence, her semi-surreptitious crossing, in spite of its seeming facility, also signals her fugitive status and attempt to enter into Mexico undetected. However, she is quickly encountered by Mendizábal and his side-kick “Chaparro”.

The first scenes build the film’s exposition, in particular, presenting Marilú and Aurelia, and situating and relating each of them to the border and one another. The exposition establishes the importance of borders and personal journey as key elements in the film. However, in having the formally dressed Marilú cross from North to South, accompanied by the contrary right to left screen movement, signals the counter-directionality of the film in relation to traditional expectations.

This analysis is in line with Claire Lindsay’s reading of the film, in which she argues that *Sin dejar huella* subverts and contests what she refers to as ambivalent characteristics of the traditional Hollywood road-movie genre. While Lindsay cites Novaro’s own denial and antipathy towards the comparison of her film with Ridley Scott’s *Thema and Louise*, Lindsay does note a possibly unavoidable intertextuality given
the global dominance of Hollywood cinema as well as the roots of the road movie genre. However, as Lindsay justifiably notes, Novaro’s *Sin dejar huella* should not be reduced to “the Mexican Thelma and Louise”, especially as I would add, given the complex visual discourse that it presents regarding the survival and unfolding of Mexican neoliberalism. Lindsay also highlights, wherein there are similarities, Novaro subverts and upends the *Thelma and Louise* model, in particular Thelma and Louise’s choice of suicide as an escape from the patriarchal violence they were ultimately unable to overcome, or only able to overcome via their own destruction. Aurelia and Marilú have a significantly more positive, although perhaps ambiguous ending which contributes to Novaro’s feminist inversion of the patriarchal structure.

Nonetheless, this scene functions to establish the facility and/or difficulty of border crossing as an important theme for the film as well as to disrupt potential viewer expectations via the inversion and confusing of registers, namely a rich women crossing the border from north to south, surreptitiously, reverses the common border crossing viewers are accustomed to seeing, namely that of a male laborer crossing from south to north. (An image Novaro nonetheless provides in the scenes to follow).

Marilú’s crossing and position relative to the border is contrasted with that of Aurelia. The first four scenes spatially and temporally match Marilú and Aurelia’s mornings, so as to weave together the two characters and storylines. Given the progress of the women from scene to scene, Novaro signals through the continuity of time that the film is running chronologically, the camera moving back and forth across space to capture what is occurring at that moment in time. From the sunrise scene in the Sonoran
desert, we jump to Aurelia’s morning routine, presenting her home, two sons and automobile.

Having packed her two sons into her Jeep Wagoneer, the school-aged Juan helping to enclose the baby Billy in his red carrier, that like the vehicle appears to be from the late 1970s or early 1980s. The red carrier is also color matched to Mendizabal’s red car from the previous scene as Novaro uses a red color match throughout the film to further contribute to the continuity while also highlighting key features, previewing a red vehicle, similar to the one that will pursue the women throughout the film, and Billy’s carrier, his safety that Aurelia attempts to maintain. Aurelia’s vehicle also notifies the viewer to its central importance for the progression of the story. Upon driving away from her house, the shot captures Aurelia’s modest house, the crow of a rooster and the loud rumble of Aurelia’s old jeep. Across the bottom of the screen, the caption “Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua” situates Aurelia’s home and simultaneously visualizes the city. Aurelia’s jeep then comes into the next long shot, positioned on a dirt road, with skyscrapers in the distance. As she drives past camera and down the dusty road away from us, an arrow indicates that the city in the distance is El Paso, Texas. The shot in its contrasts, positions Aurelia relative to the United States, and within a space marked by uneven development.

The next shot is situated on the Río Bravo, which is highlighted by the diegetic norteña music coming from Aurelia’s parked jeep. As Aurelia breastfeeds Billy next to

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60 Claire Lindsay interprets Aurelia’s Jeep Wagoneer and the Red Chrystler of their pursuants as symbolic of the gendered social relations interrogated by Novaro. Aurelia’s jeep is marked by its functionality and ability to cope with the diverse terrains, from the dirt roads of Juárez to those of southern Mexico.
her jeep and the river, the camera pans left to follow Aurelia’s line of sight to the other
side of the river where a Border Patrol truck is parked in the foreground of an industrial
site. The reverse shot captures Aurelia’s view of a man who takes off his boots and pants
and begins to walk into the river. In order to signal the danger of crossing, the long shot
of the man includes three red signs that warn of the dangers of drowning. However, the
seemingly inactive Border Patrol agent and the shallow water into which the man wades
tend to belie the potential danger and suggests a tolerant theatricality of the Border
Patrol.

The song “Contrabando de Juárez” by Miguel y Miguel, adds signifying depths to
the visual construction of the Northern border and Juarenses’ relationship to the U.S.

Me aprendieron en El Paso—después de cruzar el Bravo.

Me tomaron prisionero, cargando mi contrabando.

Me preguntaron mi nombre, y también mi procedencia.

Yo les dije soy de Juárez, ahí no piden licencia.

Que solito el Río Bravo, ya nadie podrá nadarlo.

Pero el contrabando pesa, cuando se cruza nadando.

The diegetic nature of the music is also evidenced in the sounds of the man wading into
the river, and the sound of off-screen truck horns in the distance. This combination of
sound foreshadows Marilú and Aurelia’s future journey, and the narco-corrido matches

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61 We are reminded by this scene and its particular portrayal of U.S. border security that Sin dejar huella is
a pre-Homeland Security State film. Not only has real security increased since September 11 2001, nearly
doubling the number of Border Patrol agents along the U.S.-Mexico Border, but the theatricality of
surveillance while still allowing for workers to cross has also changed—in which the U.S. has sought to
increase both real security and its image of securitization (see chapter two as well as Andreas and De
Genova “Culprits”). Also see The Department of Homeland Security’s website: “Securing and Managing
the journey’s roots in contraband as well as the importance of the road as stage for the progress of the narrative. The narco-corrido also serves to situate and characterize Aurelia’s boyfriend Saul, the narco.

The combination of images, sound and dialog in the scenes that take place along Mexico’s northern border combine to present a terrain of criminality and poverty. The music combines with the images of Ciudad Juárez to create the cartographic imaginary of the northern border as marked by its relation to the U.S. As the visual and auditory discourse suggests, the environment of the northern border is also the result of the relationship to the United States. Just as the industry draws the worker, the songs tell of how the “gringos” demand narcotics and stimulate the narcotrafficking. The images combine to portray the territory as riddled with poverty and danger, where the work opportunities are limited to illicit trade or low-wage work in the maquiladoras. However it is the combination of these factors that ultimately motivates Aurelia to leave Juárez.

The scene in which Saúl visits Aurelia in her home, bringing his drugs with him, offers a variety of clues as to the feminist inversion or interjection that the film seeks to perform. It also highlights the relationship between social reproduction, production, or in other words, the importance of family, economic necessity and Aurelia’s desire for greater autonomy in attending to the former. Novaro takes full advantage of the combination of dialog and visual clues in the mise-en-scene to communicate to viewers that patriarchal pairing and violence will be strongly contested in the film. During Saul’s first visit, the set (Aurelia’s living room) is adorned with a variety of pairs—two lace hearts hang on the wall, and two porcelain swans are on the shelf. However, one of the
hearts on the wall is upside down and the most important pair already bears the signs of castration to come—the bride and groom figurine, with a decapitated groom. We see the bride and groom when Saúl hides his stash in the nick-nacks of the house, and in none other than a figurine, or cake-topper, of a bride and groom. Saúl hides the drugs under the bride’s skirt. While Aurelia reminds Saúl that he had agreed that he was going to get out of the drug business, Saúl argues that he needs the money to take care of his mother and to pay for his sister’s quinceañera. As the two begin to kiss and undress in the kitchen, Saúl suggests that she is just upset because she has to return to work at the maquiladora. Aurelia agrees and laments that the termination of her maternity leave requires her to stop breastfeeding her baby.

The props in Aurelia’s home allude to what Laura Mulvey refers to as the male castration complex, or the male’s fear of loss of patriarchal power as expressed in classic narrative cinema. Mulvey argues that the threat of castration posed by the woman on screen has traditionally been crafted and addressed by simultaneously fetishizing the screened female, crafting her for what Mulvey famously describes as her “to-be-looked-at-ness” and constructing the narrative in such a way that the denouement provides for the mollification of the threat of castration, either via the taming of the female through marriage or the establishment of her guilt and her subsequent punishment, often in death. While Mulvey’s original assessment defined and imagined the gaze as male, and failed to account for multiple and diversely gendered gazes, it nonetheless highlights key dominant tropes in classic cinema at which Novaro takes aim.
Similarly, Novaro also points towards the dominant tropes of Mexican melodrama, as outlined by Ana López in “Tears and Desire: Women and Melodrama in the ‘Old’ Mexican Cinema”, in which López studies the relationships between the position of women in Mexican society and their cinematic positions in melodrama. As López argues, “The melodramatic is deeply embedded in Mexican and Hispanic culture and intersects with the three master narratives of Mexican society: religion, nationalism, and modernization” (507). As López also argues: “…melodrama always addresses questions of individual (gendered) identity within patriarchal culture and the heart of Mexico’s definition as a nation” (508).

Citing the colonial histories of the Virgin Guadalupe and la Malinche, at the heart of the narrative of the origins of Mexican identity, López argues that the nation is identified, on the one hand, with that of the virginal patron saint, and on the other, with the betrayal of la Malinche. With reference to La Malinche, López argues,

[thus the origins of the nation are located at a site—the violated mother—that is simultaneously an altar of veneration and the place of an original shame. […] The melodramatic became the privileged place for the symbolic reenactment of this drama of identification and the only place where female desire – and the utopian dream of its realization—could be glimpsed. (508)

Wherein melodrama functions as the site for capturing what Andrea Noble describes as “the open maternal body”, and the troubled national identity marked by gender violence, the gaping hole in the porcelain figurine, revealed upon lifting its virginal wedding dress,
indexes the traditional appropriation of this image by the patriarch, in this case, as attempted by Saúl, who simultaneously violates the doll while seeking her protection.

In the few lines that Aurelia’s boyfriend Saúl has in the film, he expresses his desire to form, lead and protect the patriarchal structure of the family, even claiming Aurelia’s youngest is his own son, attempting to rename him as Saulito. He also signals how the pressure to be the patriarch motivates him to participate in drug trafficking, and laments, after killing his narco-cousin, in self-defense, that ‘not even the family structure can trump economic pressures and the drug business: “ya ni cuenta la familia en eso”.

However, the decapitated groom indexes the film’s intervention with this imagery. Particularly Aurelia’s refusal to be victimized, as a victim of femicide, and to allow Saúl to take advantage of her perceived innocence.

Aurelia’s positionality is highlighted as Aurelia and Juan eat pizza while watching the nightly news, which through medium-close shots of Aurelia and reverse shots of the news and its diegetic sound we see a blood stained city street and learn that the number of victims (of femicide) has risen to more than two hundred and fifty. We also hear that ‘the majority of victims are workers in the maquiladoras’, which is matched by a visual of Aurelia and her immobile reflection, marking her as a potential victim.

Novaro presents filmically what Jean Franco has called the need for social “survival movements” that arise “when the state can no longer deal with the day-to-day survival of its citizens. Women who must feed their families, find shelter, and protect their children in areas where policing is nonexistent, ineffective, or in the hands of drug lords, have been forced to take matters into their own hands, organizing soup kitchens
and glass-of-milk programs, and occupying land for housing” (51 Critical Passions).

While Aurelia, and eventually Marilú, do not participate in what could be considered a formal or organized social movement, between the two of them they do take matters into their own hands, and manage to carve out a place for themselves in which they can collaborate to care for Aurelia’s two sons.

Novaro too addresses the role of the individual within the overlapping structures of patriarchal culture: the family, the economy, the state. The plot and story trace the individuals’ struggle within these forces: particularly Marilú, Saúl and Aurelia. So as opposed to arguing that the “real story” is one of feminist triumph against a backdrop of neoliberalizing Mexico, or the other way around, I posit that Novaro visually composes the narrative so that all of the above is the real story. Wherein the formation and conceptualization of the nation is a gendered project, so too is its contestation and re-imagination. Just as Harvey argues that the formants of urban consciousness are interdependent and not easily untangled, so too are the elements that Novaro captures in her film.

It is important to note that the protection of the family however is a key motivator for the actions of the characters. Yet given that the desire to provide for and protect their families induces Saúl and Aurelia to commit crimes in order to acquire the money necessary to provide for their mobility or purchases, the film suggests a tension between dominant forces that bear down on the lower classes. Given the melodramatic tendency to restore and protect the structure of the family, it is worth noting how the definition of family is projected in Sin dejar huella. Noble cites Julia Tuñón’s description of the
importance of family in Golden Age Mexican cinema:

The family is a complex institution that overlaps with the economic, social, ideological and psychological spheres and that affects the themes of society as a whole as well as those of individuals in particular. It is an organism that is half way between one and the other and for that reason has been considered the basic unit of social organization. This is what the family of Mexican melodrama is. (Tuñón 123, cited in Noble 101-102, Noble’s translation)

The family as “the household economy” functions as a site of tensions in both melodramatic and Marxist capitalist assessments. Looking outside the filmic genre, Harvey not only describes the family as a locus of power and urbanized (capitalized) consciousness formation; he also notes its shifting conceptualization. While Harvey does not interrogate the impossibility of fixing the signification of the family, he opts to describe the family in the following terms and then notes how this unit interacts with capitalist forces. Harvey argues that communities and families provide what he refers to as coping mechanisms ‘that ward off the worst aspects of class domination an alienated individualism’ provoked by capitalism (236 The Urban Experience). This aligns with Ong’s conceptualizations of exceptions to neoliberalism. Harvey cites briefly the importance of the family structure for what he refers to as the “reproduction of differentiated labor power and hence of basic class relations” noting that the family can function as a “vehicle for class domination” (237 The Urban Experience). Harvey argues that the family “exists as an island of relative autonomy within a sea of objective
bondage, perpetually adapting to the shifting currents of capitalist urbanization through its relations to individualism, community, class, and the state. It provides a haven to which individuals can withdraw from the complexities of urban life or from which they can selectively sample its pleasures and opportunities” (238 The Urban Experience).

However, as Harvey notes the “family” as such is constantly under threat by the individualizing and monetizing forces of capitalism. As Harvey argues, monetization, the subsumption of all activities and elements under capitalist logic of exchange value, dissolves the coherence of communities (25 The Urban Experience).

Novaro addresses the effects of monetization on the family in a number of scenes, through the interaction, dialog and positional staging of the characters. Through Saul and Aurelia’s interactions and comments we see how the ways in which traditional family values both serve as motivators for their ever greater sale of their production, and participation in the elicit side of the economy, and simultaneously how their participation in these economies fragment the families they attempt to maintain. As Harvey argues, “How to square the values and virtues of family life with the destructive force of money and capital is ever an interesting conundrum for bourgeois ideology” (238 The Urban Experience). Novaro, and Rivera, take up this task, in filmically portraying how their protagonists and characters respond to and participate in the neoliberal project in relation to the survival and destruction of their families.

Both Saúl and Aurelia reflect the tensions between the desires to maintain a family unit under the pressures of capitalism. However, Novaro also interrogates the patriarchal structure of the family. Having caught up to Aurelia in the Yucatán, when
Saúl laments having killed his cousin in self-defense, per his cousin’s overriding desire to recover the drug money having trumped his family allegiance, Saúl tells Aurelia, “not even the family counts in this”. This is a lesson twice learned by Saúl, given that Aurelia had already denied him the “protection” of her family structure, by selling his drugs, in order to protect what she defined as her own family, and in denying Saúl the power to give her child his name.

We see through the chain of complicating factors mentioned in Aurelia’s dialog about her work experience, and in the visual narrative, such as the danger of crossing the border and the impending danger of femicide that Aurelia is the protagonist through whom Novaro constructs a subaltern subject whose future is easily sacrificed, either as a laborer or as victim of femicide. Novaro encloses Aurelia between northern and southern borders, defined by their projects to profit from monopoly rents and their tendencies to produce over-accumulation. As we watch Aurelia begin to plan her escape, she retrieves the drugs from under the bride’s skirt, while a calendar hangs on the wall with a photo of Cancún, prefiguring her future destination, while in the second plane of the shot.

In her article “Ciudadana X: Gender Violence and the Denationalization of Women’s Rights in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico” Alicia Schmidt-Camacho argues that the neoliberalization of the economy and labor in Mexico, Ciudad Juárez being the urban geographical manifestation of this project, has required and promoted a feminized denationalized laboring subject that is evermore exposed, through impunity, to both the dangers of the workplace and the ultimate violence of feminicidio. Schmidt-Camacho argues that globalized neoliberal economics, such as those so clearly evidenced in the
development of the maquiladora industry in Ciudad Juárez, and along Mexico’s northern border, have exposed workers to a post-national or denationalized citizenship. (this as we will see in the analysis of Sleep Dealer is imagined as even more fully developed in the near future). However, as Schmidt-Camacho highlights, these “memberships” have not produced new alliances and greater protections and flexibilities, but rather have further exposed workers to “new forms of social violence and repression at the hands of both state and non-state actors (Sassen 2003, 42)” (“Ciudadana X” 260). Notably, in both Sleep Dealer and Sin dejar huella, the new alliances formed between the protagonists of divergent backgrounds, are precisely the channels through which both alternative survival and oppositional challenges to prevailing hegemony are imagined.

The Mexican migrant worker in this context, and in Schmidt-Camacho’s conceptualization, is not so much detached from his or her citizenship as he or she is entrapped by it. For it is this national belonging that marks the citizen as “exploitable”. Nonetheless, Schmidt-Camacho uses the language of “claims to citizenship” to imply access to state protections, such as the juridical. As she describes it,

The prevalence of market-led development strategies is likely only to encourage the interdependence of legal and illegal forms of commerce and production as developing countries compete for investment and income in the global economy. These processes, already long established in the Mexico-U.S. border region, constitute a substantial breach in the capacity of the Mexican state to act as guarantor of rights for its most vulnerable citizens. (266-267)
Schmidt-Camacho’s notion of “denationalized citizenship” aligns with what Ong describes as the “neoliberal exception” that “pries open the seam between sovereignty and citizenship, generating successive degrees of insecurity for low-skilled citizens and migrants who will have to look beyond the state for the safeguarding of their rights” (Neoliberalism as Exception 19).

The extension of the capitalist and particularly neoliberal logic into the consciousness of the neoliberally rationalized subject is then also highlighted by Novaro as one of the central channels through which neoliberalism bleeds into everyday life. So as to further highlight the tensions between economic necessity, as evidenced in Aurelia and Saul’s apparent poverty, once again it is Marilú who verbalizes the conflict: when asked by Aurelia how she got into illegal art trafficking, especially given her education and social status, Marilú responds ‘it’s difficult to not take the money when they put it right in front of you’ (my paraphrase): “a veces es difícil que te ponen el dinero enfrente y no tomarlo” Along these lines, Marilú embodies, as a Mexican transnational citizen, the subject that has the privilege to choose from a variety of options, but is ultimately motivated by greed. I find in this way Marilú stands in for the Mexican State and economic technocrats that helped to shape and accommodate NAFTA in Mexico.

Through her protagonists distinct positionalities, Novaro captures the divergent experiences of neoliberalism in Mexico, via their subjectivities, visualizing the ways neoliberalism is described by Ong, (Neoliberalism as Exception) in which she argues that how neoliberalism is defined and characterized depends on one’s vantage point. For some, neoliberalism is viewed as a series of market reforms allowing for the free flow of
capital, however, for others, neoliberalism implies radical capitalist imperialism tied to lawlessness and military actions. While Ong refers to Asian examples, her description of neoliberal exception is fitting for the U.S.-Mexican context and is filmically visualized by Novaro, particularly through the lives of her converging protagonists. As Ong describes it, exceptions to neoliberalism can both serve to protect social safety nets or imply the removal of political protections. Therefore, exception for Ong serves to capture how under neoliberal arrangements some, either via their inclusion or exclusion, receive or do not receive different levels of welfare benefits and the benefits of capitalist development.

Whereas Agamben and Schmidt see exception in terms of exclusion, in particular as outsiders stripped of rights in Agamben’s terms, or ally versus enemy in Schmidt’s assessment, Ong views exception more broadly, as an extraordinary departure in policy that can be deployed to include as well as exclude, that can either ‘give value to or deny value to human conduct’ (5). While Ong studies Asian contexts, her descriptions are poignantly fitting for the U.S.-Mexican context, especially in terms of the Mexican border zones. Ong argues that the “option of exception […] [allows] states to carve up their own territory so they can better engage and compete in global markets” (19). As Ong describes it, “while state retains formal sovereignty, corporations and multilateral agencies frequently exert defacto control over conditions of living, labor and migration” (19). These neoliberal arrangements result in the production of what Ong calls “overlapping sovereignties” and simultaneous striated sovereignties, mentioned above.
For the individuals laboring in these systems, this can result in divergent subject positions. Similar to the divergent narratives, outlined by Schmidt-Camacho, we see in *Sin dejar huella*, and *Sleep dealer* how these experiences of neoliberal exception are visualized. While Marilú’s illicit sales respond to neoliberal logic that favors unencumbered trade over previously defined legalities, the neoliberal imaginary that is constructed and dominates Novaro and Rivera’s films is one of radical capitalism marked by lawlessness and militarism, as experienced and negotiated by the protagonists. Furthermore, wherein these films are taking aim at the human elements of the North American neoliberal project, it is imperative to view each film with these key elements in mind.

While Mexico’s northern border development projects officially sought to lower unemployment rates and stimulate the economy and trade, they have also historically relied on low-wage labor. Both *Sin dejar huella* and *Sleep Dealer* visualize northern development as having failed to bring about economic development that affords workers a middle-class economic existence. Schmidt-Camacho signals the continuum that exists between the feminization of the laboring class in the maquiladora industry and the disposability of this feminized labor force that extends from the workplace to the ultimate destruction of agency that is *feminicidio*. As I also outlined in Chapter One, Schmidt-Camacho, among others such as Melissa Wright, notes that industrialization, marked by the inclusion of migrant labor to the northern zones has coincided with neoliberalization of the state. As Schmidt-Camacho describes it:
In this context, transformations within the state have expanded its function for social control while simultaneously weakening those institutions that provide the substance of citizenship: access to goods and services, justice, security, and political representation. (260)

This definition of citizenship imagines the state as a source of rights and protections. *Sin dejar huella* and *Sleep Dealer* ultimately, in their final imaginations, show individuals surviving, carving out their own spaces, or fighting back. But neither film imagines or projects any formal institutions providing “the substance of citizenship” as Schmidt-Camacho describes it. Given these transformations, Schmidt-Camacho argues that *feminicidio* is ‘the most brutal form of the feminization of dispensable non-citizens’ (259). Perhaps more precisely, *feminicidio* is the most brutal form of the feminization, disposabilization and crafting of subjects who do not possess the means or market values to lay claim to state protections. While Schmidt-Camacho poses the question as to whether or not the neoliberal structuring of the industrial zone is the cause of *feminicidio*, she, like many others is unable to directly link one process to the other. However, Schmidt-Camacho and Melissa Wright do outline how the Mexican State, in its “failure” to stop what is now escalating and ever expanding violence, produces the impunity of *feminicidio*, and in its production of discourses that attempt to displace blame onto victims, in combination with the State’s ability to structure the conditions of labor, certainly work in concert to contribute to the destruction and disposability of women with impunity in Ciudad Juárez. As Schmidt-Camacho posited in her talk “When Human Beings become Illegal”, (although when discussing the subject of violence suffered by
migrants crossing through Mexico), insofar as the State fails to protect, this failure constitutes a permission.

This view is projected filmically in *Sin dejar huella* through the voice of Marilú, who tells Mendizábal, “resuelve lo de las mujeres asesinadas en Juárez y a mí déjame en paz”, a statement to which he scoffs and chafes. Through the combination of Marilú’s statement, Mendizabal’s ability to laugh it off as a dismissive and unworthy cause, and the visual alignment of Aurelia with the victims of *feminicidio*, Novaro utilizes the filmic tools at her disposal to portray and capture the violence of *feminicidio* and its relation to state action/inaction.

As mentioned previously, the protagonists’ economic positions and professions are filmically constructed through the use of the dialog, visual organization of the shots and the sound. Novaro skilfully employs the narco-corrido so as to both mark and define spaces, as well as to highlight or further signify the actions of her travelling contrabandistas. In fact we only come to fully understand that Aurelia has sold Saúl’s drugs and left Juárez when we see her driving in her Jeep, packed with her children and belongings and hear “Bolsas de a gramo” by Carlos y José. The music is matched with the birds eye shot of the highway and briefly anticipates the entrance of Aurelia’s truck into the shot, followed by a close shot of her sleeping children and Aurelia driving and yawning at the sunrise. This shot again matches the use of the narco corridor with Aurelia’s presence on the screen. As we hear “Me dedico al comercial, con pura bolsa de a gramo. Pero no las corto sola, dentro lleva un polvo blanco. Los gringos me los comparan, siempre me hacen mas encargo”, it is apparent that one of the principal motors
of the trip is the sale of the drugs that provides Aurelia with the necessary money to facilitate her mobility, perhaps even capital to invest in her new future.

The use of narcocorridos, in combination with the red car that pursues Aurelia and Marilú is an obvious play, if not homage to the Almada brothers’ narco films, such as *La banda del carro rojo*. However, within this context Novaro also employs Los Tigres del Norte’s “También las mujeres pueden” to effectively remind viewers that women too can be powerful outlaws—such as Camelia la tejana. Within the narco narrative aesthetic context, Aurelia is visually closer to the perceived image of the “mujer de acción” as Mónica Lavín describes her that is the female contrabandista. Lavín writes that the “action-woman”, is distinct from that of la dama or Barbie del narco, who accompanies the male narco, and figures as an accessory to him. “Hay versturarios para las damas del narco: saten multicolor, pelo rubio o colorado y tacón muy encaramado, brillan brillantes en su garganta para que el jefe luzca su poder de aderezo sobre los animales de su reino” (182). In contrast, “Action Women” or “mujeres de acción” as Lavín refers to them are more accurately described by Los Tigres del Norte in their song “También las mujeres pueden”: “Todas vestían de vaquero y chamarra de vaqueta. También cargaban pistola, debajo de la chaqueta—mucho dinero en la bolsa y muy buenas camionetas”. (Los Tigres del Norte in Lavín 182). Per this imagination, Aurelia only seems to be missing the nice truck.

Aurelia is also further connected to the narcocorrido as the diegetic music comes from a tape player in her truck. This is signaled by the matched volume increases and

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62 Cynthia Steele also notes the play on the Almada brothers’ narcocinema.
decreases in the overhead or long shots of the vehicle that match the distance from the camera,--such as the shot in which Aurelia’s truck crosses perpendicularly in front of the bus on which Marilú travels, as well as directly noted when the music stops whenever the women turn off the key. When Marilú looks through Aurelia’s tape collection, Aurelia tells her that “son puras norteñas”. Furthermore, the inclusion of Carlos y José’s “Bolsitas de gramo” with the verse “No se lo imaginaban, eran dos grandes contrabandistas” underscores that the women are unexpected smugglers (Steele 184). In this way the visual narrative constructed by Novaro is grounded by the aural.

The two womens’ journeys through the Mexican territory, from their initially interlaced trajectories, become more fully intertwined as the women travel together. Staged along side one another, Aurelia and Marilú, begin to form a potential new alliance, or “survival movement” from within the dangerous environment they inhabit. The journey, and especially the pitstops, particularly those on or in water, such as swimming at the beach or bathing in a cenote, serve to communicate key details about the womens’ distinct and overlapping positionalities, visions and desires.

It is through the combination of the women’s desires and abilities that the film progresses and that the women reach their final destination, in “paradise”. While Marilú demonstrates through her navigating that she knows her way around the “zona maya”, as she describes it, she nonetheless lacks some of the basic survival skills that Aurelia possess, as demonstrated in her difficulties driving Aurelia’s Jeep. However, the combination of Aurelia’s driving and mechanical knowledge and Marilu’s navigating, and ability to speak maya allows them to proceed and find hideaways along their journey.
While on a vehicle barge, Marilú draws a map for Aurelia, indicating their current position, near the Tabascan coast, and the small town of Paradise. Marilú proceeds to tell Aurelia, that there are “miles de paraisos”, beaches, hotels, etc. As the men in the film are captured in various scenes with official road or state maps, (Mendizabal in his office, the pairs of pursuants at a bar, and even Juan, tracking his mother’s journey) these images illustrate how the male characters maintain and follow the existing falologocentric spatial order. In constrast, the only map we see with the women is the one that Marilú draws for Aurelia, further emphasizing the womens’ ability and desire to demarcate spaces on their own terms. However, given that Aurelia meets Marilú when stopping to ask for directions, and that from that point on, Marilú navigates the direction of the two, suggests that Novaro stages Marilú to take up the role of navigator. And on other occasions, they rely on Marilú’s familiarity with the territory, as she navigates by memory. According to Marilú, the way to “Paradise” is a dirt road, emphasizing that her paradise is not registered on the official maps used by the men, and therefore a place that is distinct from those defined by the phalologocentric order.

However, Aurelia’s versions and visions of “paradise” emphasize her distinct class positionality from Marilú, in particular her alienation from her production, and her desire to close that gap. In constrast to Marilú’s utopic vision, Aurelia points out that “paradise” is the maquiladora, “Paraíso Sports Incorporated,” in which she used to work, manufacturing parts for scuba diving equipment.

Aurelia’s alienation from the production of scuba equipment is made evident in a variety of scenes. On another occasion when the women swim together at an isolated
beach, Aurelia notes that the water is salty—suggesting that this is her first time in the ocean, to which we can deduce that she has obviously never been scuba diving, nor has the acquisitive power to do so. However, as the women swim about, Aurelia tells Marilú that someday she would like to be the owner of her own small hotel on an isolated beach, where she would heavily charge her gringo clients, demonstrating her desire to ascend to the capitalist class while inverting the current economic relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. Marilú’s agreeing response to Aurelia’s wishes is particularly telling in that she responds by telling her that ‘there are still virgin beaches south of Cancún, near Belize’, foreshadowing the film’s denoument and also conveying a desire to stake a claim in the “zona maya”. However, during the majority of the diegis, Aurelia is filmed as unable to attain her desires and is framed working and surviving while predominantly alienated from her own production while working in Mexico’s border zones.

**The Southern Border: Cancún as “Tequila Sunrise Mayan Party”**

The establishing shot of the Cancún sequence is an aerial of the resort island of Cancún, capturing the image previously noted from the calendar in Aurelia’s Juárez kitchen, followed by a medium take of what appears to be a mayan sculpture, that as the camera pans right is revealed to be the signage for a bar-restaurant: “Tequila Sunrise Mayan Party”. A previous scene from the Yucatecan hacienda where the women had taken refuge uses a similar architectural shot, focusing on the roof line of one of the old buildings. In this way, Novaro uses a visual match, or mis-match to highlight the differences between the “authentic” architecture of the hacienda and the “Tequila Sunrise” simulacra. Using the Cuban music of Juan Formell and Los Van Van, and their
song “Disco azúcar”, Novaro constructs and audio-visual cinematographic image of the cultural simulacra of Cancún, or “gringolandia” as Rebecca Torres and Janet Momsen, and Cancún locals, refer to it:

Cancún has become a simulacrum—an artificial reproduction and representation of the Yucatan physical environment and Maya Heritage manifest in a constructed physical and cultural landscape—and the result is Gringolandia, a dynamic ‘hybrid-space’ in which elements of Mexican, American, and artificial Maya culture have been reconstituted for tourist consumption. (314)

Novaro displays her visual imaginary of the process of “disneyfication” that can result from projects that push the limits of extracting monopoly rents from cultural and locational characteristics. As Harvey argues in his chapter “The Art of Rent” one of the contradictions of capturing monopoly rents is that the more marketable products or experiences become, they begin to lose their unique qualities and are opened up to the possibility of being sold as simulacra.

The festive music however is unmatched by Aurelia’s somber gaze as we see her dressed in a huipil and blending drinks for tourists in the bar. As the waiter, who wears a warrior Helmet tells her, “trabaja un ‘azteca fantasy’ con pina, Aurelia. Para los gueros en la catorce” the dialog, costume and drink titles all signal for whom this simulacra is most enjoyable. As Aurelia tosses fruits and herbs into the blender, her distant gaze, her wrist with her original watch, lacking Marilú’s Longines, and her position far from the enjoyable spaces of the beaches.
Aurelia is also positioned within the peripheral zones of Cancún, which offers a visual imaginary of the uneven development that made evident by the geographic variations. In this way Novaro captures the spaces that are occupied by Cancún workers and that are generally as invisible to tourists as the beaches are to the workers. As Torres and Momsen stress, beach access for local residents is highly restricted (317). Aurelia is positioned as a worker within the economic “stratosphere” of Cancun in a medium-shot waiting for the public bus with her baby Billy in her arms, she stands in front of giant sculpted seashells that stand as a testament to city planning and kitsch excess. The shells, as signifiers of the city’s design are matched in color and tone by the old bus that drops Aurelia in the next shot, on a dusty road in front of her run-down apartment complex—captured in a long-shot, we see Aurelia’s Cancún looks nothing like the calendar areal postcard photos. As Torres and Momsen indicate the majority of workers that tend to perform the least desirable and temporary tasks in the tourist industry of Cancún live in the peripheral zones of the city (331), the most peripheral of which “zona ejidal” lacks in the basic services of plumbing and transportation.

Novaro also uses Aurelia’s personal space to further signal her separation from her production, as there is neither Cuban music nor tropical drinks in her apartment, but rather the loud rumble of the city bus and the cold beer that Aurelia drinks as she rocks herself in a lawn chair and her baby in a hammock. Given Aurelia’s stated dream of running her own hotel, whether or not the tourists are paying a high price tag, we see that those funds certainly are not trickling down to Aurelia the bartender, as indicated by her

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63 For more information on Cancún workers’ lack of access to tourist zones see Torres and Momsen (“Gringolandia”).
lackluster apartment complex. Aurelia’s alienation from her production is further highlighted in the scenes in Cancún in which, in particular, we do not see Aurelia on the beach or scuba diving, much less as the owner of her own hotel.

The Cancún scenes also put into visual relief the uneven development and geographic divides that mark the tourist city. Cancún is the result of a project launched in 1974 and planned by the “Fondo Nacional de Fomento al Turismo” (FONATUR). The development plan resulted in three urban zones: the tourist island of Cancún, the planned city which houses local government and workers and the third—“la Colonia Puerto Juárez”, which represents an informally planned zone where many migrant workers have established their housing, although Torres and Momsen designate nine urban divisions. As Torres and Momsen highlight, sections of Cancún, both the original coconut farms of the tourist island and the “planned service city” were built on in their efforts to expand have expropriated and illegally captured ejido lands so as to further urban and tourist development. As Torres and Momsen write, the lower-class working Mexicans of Cancún travel across the spatial and social divides of the city, while the upper-class and tourist populations tend to stay in the core tourist zones “rarely ever seeing the periphery” (317).

Flexible Citizenship: Aurelia and Marilú

While Aurelia seems unable to escape her socio-economic position, as signalled by both professions, that are both marked by their positionality on Mexico’s borders, she nonetheless responds according to the logic of flexible accumulation. Marilú, on the other hand, seems to enjoy a higher degree, or benefit of “flexible citizenship” to use Aihwa
Ong’s terminology. As Ong describes it, I cite at length her central argument:

…in the era of globalization, individuals as well as governments develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and power. ‘Flexible citizenship’ refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions. In their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasize, and are regulated by, practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes. These logics and practices are produced within particular structures of meaning about family, gender, nationality, class mobility and social power. (6 Flexible Citizenship)

Just as Ong explores how “every day practice and the relations of power can illuminate how the operations of globalization are translated into cultural logics that inform behavior, identities and relationships” (22), in the films studied here, we can examine how they take up these relationships, operations and responses.

While Aurelia and Marilú effectively respond to political and economic conditions, Marilú clearly has the greater degree of mobility, as evidenced in her multiple passports, international border crossing and multilingualism. Ong notes that Harvey, in The Condition of Postmodernity, identifies flexible mobility as the “modus operandi” of late capitalism in which flexible accumulation drives systems of production, labor markets and consumption in the post-fordist period, in which labor has been unhinged
from consumption. However, Ong argues that Harvey fails to account for “human agency and its production and negotiation of cultural meanings within the normative milieus of late capitalism” (*Flexible Citizenship* 3). While I find that Harvey does attend to human agency, if not in his 1989 work, then in his later work cited herein, of import here is Ong’s conceptualization of flexible citizenship.\(^{64}\)

One of the flexibilities induced, rewarded for some, and simultaneously thwarted for others, is that of multiple national belongings. With her multiple, albeit fraudulent passports, Marilú embodies the multiple-passport holder as described by Ong. Ong finds that the flexible subject that is able to attain multiple official state memberships, “is an apt contemporary figure […] [that] embodies the split between state-imposed identity and personal identity caused by political upheavals, migration, and changing global markets” (*Flexible Citizenship* 2). Ong argues however that these multiple nationalities, do not necessarily indicate an increasing insignificance of political borders but rather a new state relationship to “capital mobility and to manipulations by citizens and noncitizens alike [?]” (*Flexible Citizenship* 2). As Ong argues, and as Marilú’s screen presence indicates, …passports have become ‘less and less attestations of citizenship, let alone of loyalty to a protective nation-state, than of claims to participate in labor markets.’ (footnote 5) The truth claims of the state that are enshrined in the passport are gradually being replaced by its counterfeit use in response to the claims of global capitalism. (*Flexible Citizenship* 2)

\(^{64}\) Jonathan Inda, in his article “A Flexible World: Capitalism, Citizenship, and Postnational Zones” also extends Harvey’s (1989) theory of flexible accumulation to include individuals, who per capitalist necessity develop flexible practices as responses to the demands of capitalism (86).
However, Ong nevertheless argues that the state-global economy relationship should be viewed from beyond the structuralist perspective, allowing for visions that interrogate the complex adjustments and realignments that take place between nation-states, economies and the ‘adroit subjects that navigate’ “the disjunctures between political landscapes and the shifting opportunities of global trade” (Flexible Citizenship 3). Just as these theorists such as Ong struggle interrogate how individuals develop strategies to respond to the demands of capitalism, and also wield their agency to attempt to control and modify such exigencies, Novaro and Rivera, through the filmic lens capture and experiment with how individuals respond and attempt to control the conditions of production, social reproduction and representation.

Therefore, Novaro contrasts Marilú and Aurelia, both in terms of their flexibility and national belonging. While Marilú profits from her multiple forms of citizenship, and national belonging—as highlighted by her ability to speak Yucatec Maya—Aurelia on the other hand embodies the citizen-subject for whom the state does not serve as an institution of protection and/or as a means of survival.

Seeing Veracruz: Petroleos del paraíso

The visual and auditory environment the women travel through also works to configure the full composition of the narrative and in particular Novaro’s imaginary of the Mexican space and the women’s’ positions relative to the Mexican state. Novaro uses a musical panorama to emphasize the diversity of the geographic spaces traversed by the travelers and to indicate their locations. Their arrival in Veracruz is marked by the replacement of the norteña narcocorrido by the sound of the radio at a mechanic shop that
indicates to viewers, through a news report and advertisements, that the Veracruz region is experiencing flooding. The women are also positioned in Veracruz through the mention of the various towns and rivers that are signaled as flooded in the radio report. As the women make yet another escape from the red car that pursues them, this time from the mechanic shop, the medium-close shot of the two women in the jeep is matched with the radio announcement: “Sabías que Octagón y Máscara Sagrada son veracruzanos? Veracrúz, ¡Un gran estado!” followed by the song “La iguana” by Grupo Chuchumbe. The visual match of the two women with audio about the wrestling duo Octagón and Máscara Sagrada, featured in the 1992 film *Octagón y Máscara Sagrada en lucha a la muerte*, aligns Marilú and Aurelia with the wrestlers who fight injustice against innocents and corruption. Within this scene, an extreme long shot of the Jeep ascending on to the Coatzacoalcos II bridge, revolves to bring the red car into the frame, parked below the bridge on the bank. The movement onto the red car is matched with the lyrics anchor “dicen que hay un hombre que sí muerde y le dicen mordilón”, further indicates against whom the female duo must fight, in this case as we will later learn, they are the corrupt federal agents that work under Mendizabal. Throughout the film, the music helps to interweave the scenes so as to smooth the transitions and produce greater fluidity between shots, and between the spaces traversed by the travelers.

The bridge which connects Veracruz State with Tabasco, was opened in 1984, and allows for river traffic to flow beneath it, particularly that of barges or ships that are dedicated to the petrochemical industry in the region, while simultaneously connecting road traffic between the two regions. It is touted as a strategic point of connection to
southeastern Mexico, and much like the development projects along Mexico’s southern and northern borders in the seventies and eighties also sought to foment and facilitate development, particularly that related to the petroleum industry, and tourism. The Coatzacoalcos I bridge, sister to the Coatzacoalcos II, connects the cities of Coatzacoalcos and Minatitlán with the PEMEX petrochemical fields.

As Novaro creates the images that capture the transition in the environmental diversity of Mexico, she features capitalist development, in its regional forms, through a variety of visual and auditory techniques. Petroleum production forms part of the visual discourse throughout the film, while it is never formally discussed by any of the characters in their dialog. Much like the intersitial scenes in *Y tu mamá también*, studied by Saldaña-Portillo, in *Sin dejar huella*, the visual references to the petroleum industry, environmental damage and global warming are key elements for the overall narrative. However, in *Sin dejar huella* these visions are seen by the educated Marilú who embodies the upper-middle class position and possesses a socially and environmentally conscious gaze. For example, on the first night of travel together, Novaro uses an extreme long establishing shot, from Marilú’s point of view, to emphasize the petroleum production plant that is visible in the background of the night shot. The darkness of night allows for a clearer appreciation of the flames from the flare stacks.

Baby Billy is also visually matched to oil production and consumption in this and the following scene. In this night scence, when the women stop along side the road, when Aurelia first presents her baby to Marilú, she holds him up in the center of the medium shot in the foreground, he is matched with the flames that the petro-processor expels,
framed in the background of the shot. Novaro also creates a visual match between baby Billy and petroleum consumption when the women stop at a gas station. As the two sit at a table in a medium shot that slowly zooms towards them, the two are framed by the window that allows us to see attendants gassing up and filling the tires of a Volkswagen van, in the next plane of the shot. The bright red plastic table in the foreground, at which the women sit, is also positioned so that a corner points directly towards the van. Baby Billy is in his carrier, on the floor between the two women, and he is hidden almost completely by the red table. Using the combination of dialog and visual cues, Novaro matches the continuously hungry Billy with an unending thirst for petroleum, as suggested by the guzzling VW Van. Aurelia comments that the breastfeeding leaves her with constant thirst and Marilú responds “es que este crío nunca deja de comer”, but as they talk, the movement of the working attendants draws the viewer’s gaze towards the vehicle, providing additional depth cues about which creatures never stop drinking. Marilú’s comment is followed by both women shifting their glances down at him, although a slight delay in the shot and Billy’s invisibility in the frame causes the viewer to follow their gazes to the gas drinking vehicle in the background, matched by a close shot of the baby as he sticks his thumb in his mouth and ceases crying, mimicking the gas nozzle that was centered in the background of the previous shot. As both women glance down at the baby their centered gazes draw us towards the gas nozzle inserted into the van, in the center of the shot, followed by a close shot of the baby, matching the gas drinking vehicle via a straight line match with the endlessly hungry Billy. So while the protagonists never directly discuss the role of petroleum in the Mexican globalized
economy and its spatial relations, scenes such as these in which the protagonists’
dramatic emphasis is simultaneously matched or distracted by the happenings in middle
ground and background, suggest that the economic and environmental elements are not
just background but in fact integral components to the narrative and as such the lives of
the protagonists.

When the women cross through the PEMEX petro fields, a travelling long shot
captures the flare stacks burning during the day. The high-lighting of the shot also allows
for the black plums of smoke to be seen by spectators, which were invisible in the night
shot. The phallic shapes of the smokes stacks are matched again with Billy in the
following scene in which Aurelia changes the baby’s diaper. The shot however starts with
a close up of the baby in his carrier, without a diaper—followed by Marilú tickling his
penis, so as to further draw the viewer’s attention to his infantile genitalia. By
associating Baby Billy with unquenched thirst for petroleum and Mexico’s masculine
production, exportation and exploitation of this resource, I find that Novaro signals the
gendered economic development while simultaneously indexing how feminine and
masculine roles each play parts in the reproduction and destruction of life.

The entangled relationships between nationalized petroleum production and social
reproduction are further emphasized when Aurelia stops in Torreón, to enroll her son
Juan in school and leave him with her schoolteacher sister Lolis, she finds her at the
“Petroleum Expropriation Elementary School” (“Escuela Primaria Expropiación
Petrolera”), whose sign is captured in a ground-level shot as Aruela parks her Jeep at the
entrance to the school. As oil was nationalized and officially put to the service of the
public by the Lázaro Cárdenas government, the shots of the school offer a vision of the relation between the national resources, particularly the nationalized oil resources, and formal education, as an example of a post-revolutionary public project. Her castigating sister, emblematic of the conservative PRI moral code, scolds Aurelia as she stands at the front of her classroom. As Aurelia is seated in a student’s desk, the height of the two sisters matches the hierarchy between the two sisters, as Lolis scolds Aruelia for not graduating, and marrying the wrong man too early—a man that would leave her with nothing but an old truck, two kids and rent to pay. However, while Aurelia shifts nervously in the desk, also simultaneously belies her diminuitive position, as she nervously smokes a cigarette—while scolded, she nevertheless continues on her journey, as the rebelous woman who smokes and drinks beer.

Novaro utilizes the Veracrúz-Tabasco travel scenes to visualize the environmental and social cost of extracting and burning fossil fuels, although, as the scene suggests, it takes a trained eye to notice it. As the women drive through Veracruz, with “La iguana” still playing in the background, Novaro uses a variety of shots to create the distinct viewing positions of both women. Through a combination of point of view shots from inside the jeep, that switch back and forth from the passenger’s side (now Aurelia) and driver’s side (Marilú) views, we see through long shots the impoverished and flooded shanty towns of Veracruz. We do not see any middle to upper-class neighborhoods flooded. The images point to the endemic poverty of the area, which is then exacerbated by flooding. These images contrast with the bright yellow bridges of Veracruz, highlighting breech between the economic benefits and development projects dedicated
to extracting the region’s rich natural resources and the local population’s alienation, and
double marginalization, from the benefits of its local industry. While Aurelia seems
curiously delighted with the new environment, commenting on how green and lush the
area is, “¡cuánta agua!” her viewing position is contrasted with that of Marilú, in both
shots and dialog, wherein Marilú negates her claim, “demasiada”. Just as Marilú gazed at
the petro processor at night, here she too is the more “environmentally conscientious” of
the two, noting that the water levels in Veracruz are indicative of flooding. The
combination of these images creates a portrait that undermines any utopic idealization of
the nationalized use of these natural resources. The run-down, yet functional, aspect of
the public school also indicates the deterioration of the public project.

La zona maya: An off-road alternative?

Throughout their journey, Aurelia and Marilú begin a process of trading in
symbolic capital. In a series of close shot-reverse-shots of Marilú and Aurelia, the two
begin to solidify their partnership through their first exchange of goods for services.
These exchanges also serve as markers in the development of their family-like
relationship, marked by both support and tension. The first exchange occurs just after the
two have been sound-matched with los enmascarados Octagon and Máscara Sagrada,
further emphasizing the initiation of a union between the two.

If communities initially structured around trade and cooperation are fragmented
by monetization, as Harvey indicates, Novaro then proposes the possibility of re-
construction of new alliances through the re-initiation of trade and cooperation. Marilú
trades her Gucci sunglasses for continued transport, food and lodging with Aurelia,
in a scene in which the two, working together through a series of manipulations, have managed to escape from their unidentified pursuants in the red car. In the first exchange, the relations seem friendly and the first trade serves to allieviate tension between the two, as well as the general stress of making getaways from their persistant pursuants, as it is the first moment in which Aurelia makes a joke and Marilú laughs—“ah, pues serán fuchi pero se ve bien”. The high-key lighting and Grupo Chuchumbe music further contributes to the levity of the scene. On a later occasion, in the run-down hotel in Paraíso, Aurelia requests Marilú’s watch in exchange for a phone card, to which Marilú chafes, telling her “Es un Longines. Vale mucho más que eso Aurelia”, although she ultimately, reluctantly hands it over. The class distinctions between the two and their monetary value systems are highlighted and contrasted in that during both trades, Marilú needs to explain to Aurelia the high value of each item, based on its name. These exchanges also suggest the arbitrary and ambiguous nature of assigning monopoly rents based on unique charateristics. Wherein Aurelia does not recognize the objects, they are stripped of their high monopoly rents.

The progression of family-like relationship between the two is highlighted in a variety of scenes. The first of which is a long-shot in which the two women, Aurelia in a black slip and Marilú in her white bra and underpants run away from the camera and into the ocean holding hands. Their black and white clothing marks the initiation of the growing partnership between the two and constrasts with the bride and groom from Aurelia’s collection of nick-nacks. Also, when Aurelia’s jeep needs repair, in the town of “Paraiso” due to what she determines is Marilú’s fault for having directed her onto the
auto-barge, the two women are staged in a long shot seated on a couch in front of a television, with baby Billy seated between the two. The mise-en-scene is constructed by the placement of a sofa and television in the yard of the auto repair shop, whose green walls, with white lettering “Video Wash. El Paraiso” compliments the green palm trees that surround it. As the two argue back and forth about whose fault it is that the jeep was damaged the scene recreates the recognizable setting of a sit-com by staging the couple that bickers over mundane necessities. The out-of-place yet familiar setting highlights the staged quality of the traditional on-screen family, while providing a space in which the two can have a disagreement.

The burgeoning of their family relationship is further signaled in Marilú’s increasing care of baby Billy, as the shots increase in which Marilú feeds, burbs or carries the baby. This is further highlighted when Aurelia’s milk dries up following the scare of what she believes is her accidental killing of Saúl by leading his car into a sinkhole, and Marilú takes up the responsibility of buying formula for Billy. Following what they believe to be their drowning of Saúl and his cousin, Marilú advises Aurelia to seek out a more stable and secure life for herself and her children. The conversation is staged in the breezeway of the Yucatecan hacienda in which they have taken refuge. Framed in the doorway, once again, the two are visually captured as a matrimonial couple of the narrative, as Marilú wears a white huipil and Aurelia a black dress.

What the two women share in common is their desire to live in “paradise”, which is most clearly vocalized by Aurelia, through her desire to run her own hotel, and her
description of its details. Novaro utilizes the Yucatán Peninsula to display a particular imaginary of “paradise”. The women take refuge in the San Juan Batista Tabi hacienda where mayan peasant Don Pascual and his family live, whose ethnicity is indicated by Marilú’s exchanges with them in yucatec mayan. Once again in a “cat and mouse” chase, Aurelia manages to out-maneuver the red car that loses control and veers into a sand dune. Marilú then directs her to turn off the highway and onto the dirt road that pierces the barely visible opening in the forest. As Lindsay highlights in her analysis of Aurelia’s Jeep Wagoneer, Aurelia’s vehicle is practical and able to handle a variety of terrains, much like Aurelia. Given that Marilú had told Aurelia that the way to Paradise was down a dirt road, Aurelia’s jeep emerges from a dense green forest on the dirt road to the expansive opening of the hacienda, conveyed by the extreme long shot of the hacienda’s main building, a space we can assume to be one of the “thousands of paradises” that Marilú describes. The high volume of the sound of birds and creatures from what viewers assume to be the surrounding forests further contributes to the edenic qualitites of the hacienda. Furthermore, as Lindsay indicates, as opposed to racing down the roadways, Aurelia’s journey is one of moderation with frequent stops, signaling a slowing down of the pace of modernity. “While Sin dejar huella sustains an ideology of mobility and fluidity in terms of subjectivity, it also seems to propose, both in the way its protagonists travel and in the ultimate disappearance of their vehicle, a purposeful deceleration and interruption of the velocity of modernity in the Mexican context” (Lindsay 98). If we

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65 The search for paradise, particularly viewed as an Edenic originality, as it is filmed here parallels with Novaro’s earlier film El jardín del eden that also takes up this desire.
66 The formal name of the hacienda is never stated in the film. I identified the hacienda.
follow Lindsay’s line of argumentation, then the protagonists’ journey down the dirt road to the colonial hacienda serve to transport the women into a space of lesser modernity.

The hacienda and its cenote, in which the women bathe and do laundry, provide not only a place of respite but also allow the women to plot an escape plan, which as we observe involves cutting a false road into the grasses so as to lead their unidentified pursuants into the cenote. In this way the women use the tools at their disposal, harnessing the red car’s extreme velocity and persistence to ultimately kill its driver and passenger (which we later learn to be Mendizabal’s henchmen). The deployment of a freshly cut road to disarm the men that seek to harm them also suggests a redeployment of the tools and practices of modernity so as to undo the patriarchal hierarchy, redirecting the social order.

Novaro also uses the hacienda to convey both the distinct viewing positions of the protagonists as well as to highlight the historical underpinnings of the Mexican socio-political-spatial order. While Marilú rocks in a hammock in one of the bright rooms of the hacienda, Aurelia contemplates the property and comments “¿Te imaginas como vivían aquí? Estaba suave ser hacendado ¿no?”. Marilú however offers a counterpoint from her hammock “mucho mejor que ser peón, no lo dudes”. Ironically, given Marilú’s cosmopolitan class position and education, she is able to imagine and claim to understand the suffering of the peasant class, a class with whom viewers might assume Aurelia would more easily identify. However, Aurelia as a member of working underclasses, nonetheless strives for greater economic autonomy and wealth, as indicated by her desire to

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67 Cenote is the word used to describe a watery sink-hole in the karst topography of the Yucatán.
own her own hotel. The hacienda, which was one of the first properties in the region designated by the Encomienda system, serves as an architectural testament to the high-points of colonial exploitation and subsequent economic booms and busts in the Peninsula, serving to visualize the creative destruction that marks global capitalism and simultaneously as a stage on which to imagine the possible re-appropriation and use of the space by its inhabitants, which in this case is the mayan family of Don Pascual. While Don Pascual may be only the caretaker of the property, given that we see his family as the only inhabitants of the immense buildings and expansive land, suggests a mayan reclaiming of previously colonized space.

In “City Future in City Past: Balzac’s Cartographic Imagination” Harvey posits that artists, such as writers like Balzac, play a role, much like that of the architect and urban planner, in that they, through their work, envision alternative futures as well as “provide observations on urban life” (“City Future” 25). Harvey argues that while Balzac may not have been able to directly influence the works of Parisian urban planner such as Georges Haussmann, his works, along with those of other novelists of the period “permeate thought in more subtle ways, helping to create a climate of opinion or some ‘consensus of the imagination’ in which certain kinds of political-economic action suddenly seem both possible and desireable” (24). I find Harvey’s observations and interpretation of Balzac’s works to be of utmost relevance to the present analysis of these films. In particular, just as Harvey argues that “Balzac not only found a way to represent the city as a constellation of class forces, but in so doing, he opended new perspectives on what the city was and could become” ( “City Future” 26). Along these lines, Novaro
utilizes the filmic genre to construct a visualization of contemporary neoliberalizing Mexico and to imagine possible alternatives. Furthermore, Harvey argues that this last argument is precisely the reason why Marx was particularly interested in Balzac’s works, in spite of their ideological differences. I find that Novaro frames the film in such a way so as to do similar representational work as Balzac and his contemporaries:

They provided countless acute observations on urban life [...]. They recorded much about their material world and the social processes (desires, motivations, activities, collusion, and coercion) flowing around them. They explored different ways to represent that world and helped shape the popular imagination regarding what the city was a might be about. (“City Future” 25-26)

Novaro frames and utilizes the spaces of the U.S.-Mexico border, Cancún, and Veracruz to contemplate the desires of the protagonists the socio-economic processes surrounding and motivating them. These are the spaces that Novaro uses to visualize the social processes that are at work in post-NAFTA Mexico. The Yucatán region, particularly, the rural zones of the peninsula, and the isolated beaches are the spaces in which Novaro projects possible alternatives and futures. I also find that the use of the colonial hacienda, in combination with the other places featured in the film, works to suggest that the latest unfolding of global capitalism in Mexico, marked by privatization, which will be most poignantly featured in the last scenes of the film, is part of a historical process that dates back to the conquest and colonial period. The hacienda, Cancún, the maquiladora industry in Ciudad Juárez, the petroleum fields of Veracruz, are all places
that have been designed and constructed to yield maximum profits, whose economic benefits have not been enjoyed by the majority of the workers, inhabitants and especially those removed and expropriated for the development of each place, as made visibly suggested by Aurelia’s neighborhoods in Juárez and Cancún and the flooded homes in Veracruz.

Curiously, however, Novaro does not portray Don Pascual as a peasant per se, although his dress and broken Spanish position him as a member of the lowest economic classes, there is no visible presence of an Hacendado. But rather, Novaro projects an “authentic” “exotic” and idyllic imaginary of the Mayan Yucatan in which the Mayan inhabitants appear to function autonomously without the presence of overseeing upper class land-owners: On the hacienda and in Heraclio Chuc’s town, Acanceh, captured in scenes that show Heraclio crafting the artifacts in which Marilú deals, and riding through the plaza on a trici-taxi, as well as Maya-speaking government tourist police taking photographs of tourists in front of mayan ruins and assisting Heraclio in the copying of images from the ruins, the local inhabitants appear to be surviving and thriving particularly through the sale of mayaness and/or the repossession of formally colonized spaces.

The rural zones of the Yucatán, however, contrast with the gaudy simulacra of the Cancún restaurant “Tequila Sunrise Mayan Party” and impoverished realities of Cancún. Novaro’s cartographic imaginary of the rural areas of the Yucatan peninsula is one of a territory separate and different from the rest of Mexico, projecting a utopic vision, and ultimately, desire for a pre-hispanic Mayan territory, imagined as post-hispanic Mayan
reclaiming. As Novaro described her filmic construction of the Yucatán in an interview with Fernando Brenner:

…quería mostrar un México muy contrastante: el sur y el norte. Y dos mujeres muy diferentes. Además, una de ellas tenía que tener más capacidad para ver a México, precisamente por no ser mexicana. Ése fue mi punto de partida, y una sensación que tengo: no me siento mexicana en la zona de Yucatán, como le pasa a muchos mexicanos, pues estamos en la región maya. (Novaro in Steele 185)

In the sense that Novaro wishes to display what could otherwise be described as a geo-centric (i.e. D.F.) vision of the Yucatán, (and the U.S. border) and the film is constructed accordingly, it reveals a particular conceptualization, that is then conveyed filmically of national belonging that excludes while desiring the indigenous communities.

Furthermore, I find that Novaro’s choice of not filming in Central Mexico, having the women ‘avoid the federal district due to road construction’, imagines a geo-centric spectator and works to position the camera in Central Mexico, looking outwards, and revolving on its own fulcrum.

While Novaro claims that Marilú has a greater capacity for seeing Mexico than Aurelia, and she clearly creates scenes that aim to portray that image, nevertheless it could be argued that Aurelia simply has a distinct viewing position, as opposed to a lesser one. Conversely, Novaro’s comments could be understood to say that Marilú, due to her social position, has more freedom and opportunity to travel throughout Mexico and the privilege of studying it, possessing a higher degree of flexible citizenship as I have
argued earlier. Aurelia’s naivetee is further constructed in the shot in which the two women walk through one of the large decrepit buildings of the hacienda, its roof long rotted away, marked by its mildewed enormous frame, overgrown with trees and bushes. The predominance of bird chirping that accompanies the scene also contributes to the image of nature reclaiming this space. The camerawork captures the immense size of the structure as its stationary position starts from a point of view shot of the roof’s frame, from Aurelia’s POV, to slowly rack down, catching the women in an extreme long shot walking away, still within the giant building. As Aurelia glances up at the cross beams of the roof, she remarks how beautiful the place is and then innocently asks “pero por qué no le habrán puesto techo?” The camera also works to shift from Aureila’s viewing position to that of the spectator’s, highlighting how her nostalgic or pleasured viewing is marked by a lack of historical knowledge, as she fails to see the space’s colonial past, as Marilú surely does.

The high sound levels of birds chirping in the hacienda and cenote scenes further contributes to the construction of a place dominated and re-claimed by nature. The reclamation by nature re-aimed by nature is matched with the Mayan repossession of the space. I find that Novaro’s cartographic imagination of the rural areas of the Yucatan Peninsula is marked by exoticism, in which all of the majority of inhabitants featured are filmed speaking Yucatec Maya, and as bilinguals. Furthermore, through the use of dialog in Yucatec Maya without subtitles, Novaro contributes to the non-Maya-speaking-viewer’s exclusion from the linguistic space, and estrangement within the physical-visual environment, which apparently mimics Novaro’s own viewing position. Aurelia refers to
one of Marilú’s secret conversations, in which she deliberately switches to Maya to avoid Aurelia overhearing her directions to Heraclio Chuc, as “speaking in code”—yet another example of her naiveté to which Marilú retorts that she is speaking Maya.

This imaginary of the Mayan enclaves of the Yucatán as tropical Edenic utopias, even if only as temporary pit-stops for the protagonists, presents a vision of a Maya reclaiming of space, which most notably indexes the Zapatista uprising in 1994. I find that Novaro uses the Yucatecan spaces to visualize possible futures, in particular in relation to the Zapatista uprising, in this case visualizing what a Mayan re-appropriation of the spaces of both colonization as well as contemporary cultural tourism might look like.

The references to the Zapatista National Liberation Army are direct as well as indirect. When the women leave the hacienda, following what they believe to be their killing of Saúl in the cenote, the tone of the film clearly shifts, as the more languid music indicates. As Marilú and Aurelia glare back and forth at one another, a close shot captures Aurelia clutching her flowered bag, in which she carries the cash from her drug sales. The two watches on her arm are also visible from what we perceive to be Marilú’s POV. As Marilú contemplates the stash, that she had earlier discovered when snooping through Aurelia’s belongings, the viewer can imagine, through the lengthy close shot of Marilú, that she contemplates stealing it, given her earlier comments on the temptations that money provokes. This close shot of Aurelia’s money and acquired symbolic capital, in combination with the close contemplative shot of Marilú, are followed by a medium-shot of a graffiti-painted wall with large letters stating “VIVA EL E.Z.L.N”, below which
three feral dogs feed and wander about. Just as the Zapatistas have denounced the conditions of depravation, theft and injustice that the indigenous communities of Mexico, and America’s, have faced since colonization, I find this shot serves not only as a descriptive detail of the town Tícul, in to which the jeep enters, but as a parallel warning—just as the Spanish were driven by greed and plundered the indigenous populations wealth and resources, Marilú, the Spaniard, is about to succumb to a similar temptation—\---in spite of the fact that she had earlier described her ideal man as Subcomandante Marcos.

Marilú’s familiarity with and knowledge of the Mayan Yucatán, and her socially conscientious observations are nonetheless contradicted by her greedy behavior. When Aurelia accidentally leaves her flowered bag on her seat at the hotel restaurant in Tícul, (a hotel that she offers to pay for, after Marilú reveals she has a credit card—\---which however is unaccepted by the hotel), Marilú steals the bag of money and disappears into the night, not to return until a month later when she re-appears in Cancún, to reunite with Aurelia and return the money. Through Marilú, Novaro posits a visualization of how the middle-upper classes, and in this case the Spanish, take advantage of, and steal from members of the lower classes. In similar fashion to the way in which Saldaña-Portillo interprets Tenoch’s behavior in Y tu mamá también, wherein he wears a Subcomandante Marcos t-shirt while comfortably being waited on hand and foot by his nurse-maid in his house full of servants and pre-colombian art, Marilú, at least in the first instance chooses to favor her own self-interests over that of the partnership that had been forming between her and
Aurelia. With Saldaña-Portillo’s interpretation of Tenoch in mind, it seems that in *Sin dejar huella*, Novaro too reveals both the contradictions and desires of the upper-classes, as embodied in Marilú, that Marilú’s concern for the indigenous and the poor, “lo popular y lo indígena”, extends only so far as to be a sentiment, not realized in practice and/or not extended to the less-exotic Aurelia.

*Sin dejar huella*’s denouement presents a montage of mini-denouements for the main characters, and serves to project an imaginary of possible futures in neoliberalizing Mexico. The film ends as Aurelia greets Juan at the Cancún airport. In keeping with her style, Novaro employs the song “El mundo se va acabar” played by *El grupo mono blanco*, to further direct the spectator’s interpretation of the closing scenes. The Norteña music that was matched with Aurelia and her Wagoneer, has disappeared with the Jeep, (stolen by Saúl), shifting control of the music and the direction of the women to Marilú, who surprisingly reappears at the airport, with the serenade and Aurelia’s flowered bag with the money. The popular Jarocho music, and typical yucatecan serenade, also emphasizes a Yucatecan denouement, the region in which Marilú is the expert, and therefore a greater dependence on her knowledge and contributions.

As Marilú reveals to Aurelia that it was she who had taken her money, she takes the handles of Billy’s stroller and begins to lead the new family away from the airport.

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68 As Saldaña-Portillo describes it: “The entire scene conveys Tenoch’s unquestioned acceptance of his own pampered privilege vis-à-vis the servile subaltern subjects. By wearing the T-shirt, then, Tenoch is not so much identifying against his own class interests as he is expressing a desire for a return to an era of political mestizaje, of political accommodation between PRI leadership and the leadership of the popular classes made possible under a previous model of papa PRI. As a social climber from the working class, Julio functions as the appropriate substitute for this desired identification” (765).

69 *El grupo mono blanco* plays traditional Jarocho music, but they formed the group in Mexico City, and do not actually hail from the Yucatán.
entrance, effectively taking up almost instantaneously and quite happily, without invitation, a parenting role, and control of the direction of the women and children. Aurelia incredulously follows alongside her, although quickly changing her surprised gaze to a smile. When Marilú reveals her real name is not “Ana”, Aurelia laughs and responds, effectively renaming her “hija de la chingada”—(this title marks her as a mestiza Mexican, as Marilú herself claims, “nací aquí”) As the women happily reunite, the song’s lyrics provide important clues to the dystopic tone and significations Novaro assigns to the denouement:

Coro: El mundo se va a acabar (2x)
Si un día me has de querer,
Tú debes apresurar.
Ni qué dudar,
Mira la tierra,
Con tanta Guerra,
¿Dónde va a dar?
No hay que esperar.
El mundo es loco.
Y queda poco tiempo de amar,
Y digo yo.

The camera pans up to the palms above the airport which serves to seam together the next scene in which we see Juan playing at an isolated beach, on which the women relax in front of a hut. Marilú reads to baby Billy in a hammock and Aurelia sits at a
picnic table. The happy scene is marked however by the upbeat rhythm and tone, yet dystopic lyrics, of the song that continues to play, now extra-diegetically. Given their previous conversations, it appears that the women have effectively carved out a space in “paradise” on what we can assume to be one of the “virgin beaches” described by Marilú earlier in the film.

The lyrics suggest both a surrender and a “carpe-diem” sentiment, describing apocalyptic endings that the protagonists (of the song-film) apparently cannot control. Novaro matches the song with four more sequences that further contribute to a dystopic finale: In the next shot, the women take turns posing, in a long shot, with life-size cardboard cutouts of their “ideal men” as earlier described by each—El Bronco, José Guadalupe Esparza, the grupero musician for Aurelia and El Subcomandante Marcos, seated on a horse, for Marilú. This is followed a shot in which we see that Mendizabal’s assistant, Chaparro, has ascended to Governor and Saúl works as his security guard, effectively maintaining the order of the state, but at a far-distance from the protagonists. The next shot shows that Heraclio Chuc appears to have been elected as Alcalde, as he is adorned in the sash and the huipil adorned women applaud in a semi-circle around him.

The final shot, however, offers the most direct visual commentary on the ever increasing neoliberalization of the Mexican economy and space: re-tracing the key spaces of the journey, this last long shot takes us to the PEMEX petroleum fields, on a bright sunny day, where, in the third plane of the shot, the flare stacks flames spew dark black smoke against the bright blue sky. From a small boat, in what we presume are the flooded zones of Veracruz, a worker emerges, and replaces the faded PEMEX sign, in foreground
of the shot, with a bright blue and red sign reading “EXHELL” adorned with an upside-down seashell. The worker’s bright red helmet helps to highlight his reluctant yet surrendered disapproval as he shakes his head, and returns to the boat. The visual images are matched with the second verse of the song, further emphasizing the human role in environmental destruction:

Pon atención, no te das cuenta,
que el hombre inventa la destrucción.

Por la erosión, el río agoniza,
y eso da prisa a mi pasión y digo yo

The closing sequence allows spectators to see how each character proceeds as well as for Novaro to offer her final commentary on the use of space and resources as well as gendered relationships. As Steele describes the final sequence:

En medio del Paraíso, sigue adelante la desnacionalización / globalización / colonización. Lo que les queda a las dos protagonistas—y a todos nosotros—es la vida digna; la autosuficiencia, aunque sea ganada a través de las tretas del débil; el amor sin dependencias; las amistades construidas a través del muchísimo trabajo; y el disfrute del paraíso terrenal al punto de perderse. (190)

However, the references to Mayan revolution in this last sequence are ambiguous and neither Steele nor Lindsay offer an interpretation of the political commentary carried by the reference to Subcomandante Marcos, nor that of Heraclio Chuc. The one-dimensional cutouts of Subcomandante Marcos and José Guadalupe Esparza index the
fictitious nature of “the perfect man”, and serve to disempower the otherwise larger-than-life masculine stars/heroes/leaders, a point also noted by Steele. However while Novaro inverts the traditional patriarchal narrative film structure, in particular through the castration of the male threats to the women, (turning the men’s motivations against themselves, as it is Saúl that eliminates Mendizabal) Novaro nevertheless utilizes and reproduces the melodramatic structure in which the family is reunited at the end of the film. In this case, however, she suggests, per the pairing of Aurelia and Marilú a feminine family that breaks with homonormative expectations. I do not find that film structure portrays the protagonists as lovers, but given that the two women are shown at the beach each caring for a child, suggests that they have established a new family, in a place structurally distant from Cancún and Ciudad Juárez. As Lindsay interprets the denouement, the protagonists depart from modernity, as suggested by their off-the-road final destination.

As the women pose for the camera of the film, and therefore for the spectators, the scene also plays with the melodramatic expectations of happy endings with married pairs, as if to say, tongue in cheek—look, here is that image you were expecting—the protagonists with their ideal men.

The similarities between the Aurelia and Marilú and their “ideal men” provide additional insight for interpreting this final sequence. For example, the biography of the musical group Bronco is similar to that of Aurelia, as their website attests:

En un camioncito muy modesto se fueron a realizar su primera presentación fuera de Monterrey, en un pueblito del estado de Coahuila,
este acontecimiento significaba mucho para ellos porque se iban a dar a conocer en otro estado, sin embargo grande fue su sorpresa que al llegar el único público que los esperaba era un perro que se paseaba por la pista.

Todos desanimados regresaron a Monterrey. (“El Bronco”)

The Bronco song used in the film is none other than “Qué no quede huella”, one of their most popular songs, in which the singer hopes to erase the traces of a former lover that broke his heart. The song is employed in a scene that unites both pairs of male pursuants in a “bar de mala vida”, where both duos, separately, discuss how they plan to catch and dispose of the women that continue to elude them. Therefore, on one level, the cardboard men certainly attest to the failings of the male-female relationships in the film, and the ultimate fragility of the male figure.

However, the cardboard cutout of Subcomandante Marcos, invites an interpretation of its political implications, both due to the other references to the EZLN throughout the film and also given the film’s final visual portrait of unfolding neoliberalism. To read the cardboard Subcomandante Marcos as only a reference to the ficticious construction of the ideal man misses entirely the political commentary his image suggests. Neither Lindsay nor Steele offer interpretations of the image along these lines. While Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista rebels hide their faces, arguing that the anonymity signifies the shared identity of those for whom the movement speaks, or is silent, suggesting on the one hand that the figure of Subcomandante Marcos is, per his own construction, a symbolic fiction. As Saldaña-Portilla describes it
From behind their masks, their *pasamontañas* and bandannas, the EZLN calls for a second revolution, emphatically and repeatedly placing themselves within the genealogy of this first paradigmatic revolutions for Latin America through their communiqués and democratic performances. They make their appeal to the nation from within the discursive terms of the 1910 revolution, even participating in the developmentalism of mestizaje through their untoethnographic choice of representation as the folk origin of the Mexican nation. And yet they also exceed the discursive terms of the revolutionary mestizo nationalism of 1910. The Zapatistas seize the mask of Indian difference in an attempt to fill its ‘empty’ content with Indian specificity, a specificity that is neither pre-Hispanic or postmodern but offers Mexican citizens an alternative modernity. (*The Revolutionary Imagination* 253)

The cutouts suggest both the impossibility of fixing significations and how the public figure also functions as an empty signifier to which its viewers assign meaning. Furthermore, the cutouts also reference the iconic characteristics of public personas and heroes. As Brian Gollnick writes:

Che Guevara is by now a historical figure whose life and activities bear little resemblance to his on-going deployment as a cultural icon. But he remains a cultural icon in much the same way that Emiliano Zapata does or that Sub-comandante Marcos is rapidly becoming: as figures of dedicated resistance whose appeal is as much emotional or moral as it is
specifically historical or political. In that role, their importance is not to be overlooked as part of the on-going dissemination of an oppositional imaginary. (119)

However, given that the image of Subcomandante Marcos is reproduced via the one-dimensional cardboard, I find that it simultaneously denotes both the distance between the icon and the man and the staged qualities of public personas, and simultaneously renders fragile this oppositional imaginary. Given the context of the film’s finale and its visualization of privatization of public resources, it must be asked then, as the un-declared yet recognized figurehead of the Zapatista resistance, does the scene undermine or suggest a failed political project on the part of the Zapatistas? Given that at the time of filming, neoliberal policies and practices continued at full-speed while the Zapatista demands had not been met, on one level the scene could be understood as a reflection on the unfulfilled demands of the Zapatistas. One the other hand, if we are to align Aurelia with the lead singer of Bronco, then are we also to associate Marilú with El Subcomandante Marcos? Are we to associate his middle-class, educated and non-indigenous identity, and his position on the horse with Marilú’s class position? Is the horse suggestive of her Spanish colonizing origins?

I pose this final question particularly because of the desires deployed in the women’s final staging—their own private “paradise”, surrounded by neoliberalism’s destructive march forward, as well as a simultaneous Mayan reclamation of the spaces of colonization (i.e. Heraclio Chuc). How are we to understand the constrasting images of Heraclio Chuc’s success with that of Subcomandante Marcos’s failure? As Harvey claims
of Balzac’s pastoral utopianism “almost all utopian schemes and representations are riddled with nostalgia” (“City Future” 29).

The utopic image of the women extracting themselves from the modernizing equation, as Lindsay sees it, also unites two actors from distinct class positions, notably an intellectual global class with the working underclass, while simultaneously separating them from indigenous Maya. The nostalgic desires deployed here seem to be those both of a class unification, much like that of “El PRI papá” and “El pueblo” noted by Saldaña-Portillo in Tenoch and Julio in Y tu mamá también, within what Novaro films as the Zona Maya yet seemingly unintegrated. Furthermore, the scene renders visible the “cartographic passions” of the protagonists—their own “virgin” beach on which they can concentrate on social reproduction, as suggested by the images of caring for and reading to the children and seemingly without needing to sell their labor. Positioning the women on the beach in the zona maya imagines a nostalgic return to a pre-hispanic “virgin” origin. However, in order for the beach to signify an idyllic utopia it requires a number of erasures—namely, of the money from transnationally traded contraband (drugs and art) that presumably affords such simple luxury, and most importantly, an erasure of the expropriation or purchase of land, in order to stake a claim in the zona maya and call the land “virgin” requires the ultimate delinking of the sign from the signifier, erasing the trace, para que no quede huella.

Sleep Dealer: NAFTA in Mexico Future 70

If Novaro’s film offers both dystopic warning signs as well as utopic departures 71

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70 I adopt my syntax here from Harvey’s “City Future in City Past”.
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from within neoliberalizing Mexico, Rivera’s *Sleep Dealer* offers a fast-forward to the near future, visualizing a “possible future” for fully neoliberalized Mexico, as well as spaces and opportunities for disrupting, contesting and re-directing the organization of space, resources and capital. As Luis Martín Cabera describes *Sleep Dealer*: “As with everything else in this futuristic cult film, what today are latent tendencies become fully developed in the most dystopian fashion in the film” (591).

If we return to Hind and Sánchez-Prado’s lines of argumentation about what Post-Nafta cinema in Mexico tends to do: namely not backing the odds for successful activism (Hind) and reducing violence to failures with in a moral code, effectively de-linking violence from the neoliberal socio-economic and political social structure (Sánchez-Prado), then I posit that Novaro’s film does tend to signal the structural nature of violence and poverty (as a form of violence) by creating visual and dialogic links between examples such as *feminicidio*, the devaluation of Aurelia’s labor and Mendizabal’s willingness to ignore the *feminicidios*. Similarly, the women’s actions are positioned by Novaro, as I have examined in detail above, in such a way so as to connect them with larger socio-economic structures, namely globalized capitalism in Mexico and the drive to bring investment to Mexico. However, on the topic of ‘backing the odds for activism’, I find that Novaro’s film is ultimately ambiguous on this point. Does the film, within its code, back the odds? Yes and No.

On the other hand, Rivera’s *Sleep Dealer* is much more direct in terms of constructing a visualization of potential activism that can effectively use the tools at

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71 What Lindsay refers to as ‘departures from modernity’.
hand, the machinations currently used to drive capitalism and produce surplus value, to distinct ends—particularly the destruction of privatized and militarized natural resources and their return to communal holdings for subsistence agriculture. While this study is not a comparison of the two, I argue that both filmmakers seem quite adept at constructing visual images that portray the underside of the fiction of development on which NAFTA’s founders relied. However, I find that *Sleep Dealer* is more direct in addressing and visualizing “those whose present is sacrificed for the nation’s future”. Where Aurelia is constructed as the individual who represents another potential victim, of both neoliberalism and *feminicidio*, fates she escapes in the end, Novaro does not go so far as to center her camera or the diegis on what Subcomandante Marcos has referred to as “Basement Mexico”—the most impoverished and indigenous sectors and individuals in Mexico. Rivera, however, does not center his narrative on an indigenous protagonist, but constructs Memo as a young subaltern “ni-ni” whose ‘future has already been sacrificed for Del Rio Inc.’s profits.

Rivera sets up the film’s structure so as to allow for Memo to narrate, from what is apparently his present, a series of past events that occupy the majority of the diegis. The film’s denouement reconnects with his present, set in Tijuana. Memo’s extradiegetic narration serves to underscore the story telling function and structure of the film. This is further highlighted in Luz’s occupation as a writer who sells Memo’s story to Rudy, an act which serves as both a betrayal and a unifying gesture that ultimately serves to connect the three in the film’s climax, i.e. the drone attack on the dam.

Rivera begins the film in with a sequence of watery images that feature Memo
working in the Sleep Dealers, with shots of his eyes covered by the contact lenses that attach him to the machine, as well as images of the nodes that connect to his body, as well as images of yucca plants in Oaxaca. Within this sequence, Memo narrates in the past tense, so as to alert viewers that the temporal order will be manipulated, ultimately telling a story in the past tense. The opening sequence serves to introduce viewers to the central conflict of the film—Memo’s exploitation in the Sleep Dealers, which we will come to see throughout the plotline, as the result of his father’s death, which was the result of his hacking into the system.

As we see him working in the infomaquila, Memo’s extradiegetic voice narrates:


Each of these sentences is matched with changing images, that include a shot from the scaffolding in San Diego where Memo’s robot operates, a close-shot of Memo’s hand flipping on his radio switch, as well as matches between the last sentences and a bird’s eye shot of Memo’s house in Oaxaca. The opening sequence also serves to introduce viewers to the spatial journey that Memo will take in the film, which will come full-circle in the film’s denouement—that is from Oaxaca to Tijuana and back again.

In the exposition scene in Oaxaca, Rivera presents us with Memo’s family and life, which per Memo’s interrupting extradiegetic narrations in the past tense; remind us
that these images belong to his pre-Sleep Dealer past. The sequence features contrasting images featuring water and the arid and dusty landscape of Santa Ana del Rio, the privatized water resources of Del Rio Inc., and Memo’s family plot, or milpa, whose aridity is further highlighted by the yellow tone of the shots. As the opening Oaxaca shot is a close shot of water being poured from a pitcher followed by Memo’s mother’s comments “necesitamos agua”, Rivera foreshadows and provides visual clues to the centrality of water as a theme of the narrative.

It is through Memo’s relationship with his father that we glean what “futures” have been sacrificed, namely those of Memo’s family and the surrounding community. We learn in the next shots that Memo and his father must go purchase water from the privatized lake, in order to water their crops and for the family’s consumption. By framing Memo and his father walking through a dried up river bed, Rivera emphasizes the spaces where water once ran—matching the desiccated landscape with Memo’s father’s diminished power.

As Memo narrates, the extradiegetic voice is matched by a close shot of Memo, so as to highlight his central characteristic as narrator:

Para mí, Santa Ana era una trampa. Seca. Sola. Desconectada. Pero mi padre se lo vive en sus memorias del pueblo. Tenía terrenos, hasta que contrataba a chavos del pueblo para que le echaran la mano. Se sentía el mero patrón. Pero dicen que cambió, cuando contruyeron la presa.

The contrasting shots of Memo and his father, and finally his father’s POV of the dam in an extreme long shot, serve to foreground the distinct viewing positions each character
occupies. Memo, who now tells the story from his memories, reflects on how his vision of the dry and isolated present, prevented him from seeing both a past and a future in Santa Ana del Rio. Upon asking his father why they stay in Santa Ana del Rio, Memo’s father asks Memo ‘if he believes if the future belongs to the past’. While Memo laughs, his father, on the other hand, explains to Memo how the family’s future was effectively cut off when they were cut off from their water source, the source of their subsistence. “Tuvimos un futuro. Estás parado en él. Cuando ellos obstuyeron el río, cortaron nuestro futuro”. Martín Cabrera describes this sequence using Marxist terminology: “This first narrative thread is the product of a classic process of primitive accumulation and enclosure of the commons” (591).

By situating this sequence on both the family’s plot of land and around the dam, Rivera directly signals the shift to primitive accumulation and privatization of communal land holdings, that was furthered under NAFTA and the Mexican government’s constitutional accommodations in the run-up to NAFTA, particularly the amendment to the 1917 constitution’s twenty-seventh article, that effectively permitted both the privatization of previously protected communal land holdings, ejidos, and also served the final death blow to pending post-revolutionary claims to communal lands. As the scene makes evident, through the use of money for water, subsistence and previously un-waged labor have been subsumed to the capitalist mode of production, de-linking the naturally reproductive cycle and rendering it nearly fruitless, as suggested by the extremely dry conditions.
The visual sequence of the dam and the men in the family plot, also allows Rivera to imagine possible futures when taken to their logical extreme. As the men approach the dam, a shadow of a remotely-piloted drone moves over the two men. Arriving at the chain linked, and razor-wired fence that surrounds the water reserve, an armed camera, with a speaker, directs them to step back and to pay eighty-five U.S. dollars for thirty-five liters of water. The camera’s speaker gives them directions in English, followed by Spanish from another voice, a direction to which Memo responds under his breath, “poca madre”. While the English speaking camera and use of U.S. dollars highlights the cultural and national neo-imperial powers in which the privatizing capitalist project is embedded, the hyperbole, that is the extreme price for so little water, functions to awaken spectators to what some might view as both the ridiculous and yet very real nature of the capitalization of natural resources. Or, in other words, the hyperbolic price and ridiculous armed guards, by today’s standards, serves to highlight the violent theft carried out through the neoliberal arrangement, uncloaked, visualizing extreme possible futures.

The scene also renders visible, as Mark Bould highlights, “accumulation by dispossession” which according to David Harvey (Brief History), marks much of neoliberalism’s upward movement of capital to the elite capitalist class, as opposed to growth. Harvey also highlights in The Enigma of Capital that accumulation via dispossession occurs through mechanisms that are developed to disposes, i.e. “mechanisms of dispossession” (245). The subprime mortgage crisis in the U.S. is one example that Harvey uses in his talks and writings,72 Per Harvey’s description, the

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72 See Harvey “Accumulation by Dispossession” (web).
Mexican government’s accommodations of state policies in favor of liberalizing privatization in Mexico, are another formal mechanism of dispossession, which Rivera visualizes in this sequence. This is in line with Bould’s interpretation of the privatized water:

This ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2010: 249) – turning a common, shared resource into a commodity – is part of a neoliberal capitalism that, through ‘the ever-accelerating extension of credit’ monetises and thus appropriates and accumulates ‘the future itself’ and ‘thereby uses it up’ (Shaviro 2010a: 32). (193)

The other “latent tendencies” of the turn of the century U.S.-Mexico relation and neoliberalizing project that are filmed as more fully developed by Rivera are the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and the neo-colonial/neo-imperial neoliberal project, as described in the introduction of the present study, and as highlighted by Harvey (“Brief History”), Brown, Duggan and Ong. One of the ways in which Rivera portrays the possible neoliberal future is by visualizing it as marked by presence of armed security forces that are used to secure “assets” such as Del Rio Inc.’s water that is piped to the U.S.

The progression and compression of the motivations in the film work to signal neoliberalism as the problem to be addressed by the film. The neoliberal dispositif, as it is imagined in the film, is projected as a neo-imperial militarized project that works to maintain the already privatized sectors, such as communal water resources, or “enclosed commons”. This arrangement which submits natural resources to market values and
exchanges them on the free-market, further necessitates and produces laborers, such as Memo and potentially his father, who will have to sell their surplus labor on the market as opposed to using their labor for subsistence production.

The State, as it is imagined by Rivera, has been privatized and/or is working in the service of the market. This is visualized in a number of scenes, in particular those that feature security agents. On one level, the Mexican State appears to be present in world of *Sleep Dealer*, via its absence. The State makes itself present only insofar as it appears to have either given permission, or have been coerced to allow for the dollarization of the economy, and for the country’s natural resources to be fully privatized by companies such as Del Rio. The other “presence” of the State, or what for all intents and purposes looks like the state, is captured in the security forces featured in the film, which on the Mexican side of the border are adorned in black clothing, helmets and armed with automatic assault rifles. While the agents that guard the Del Rio water wear uniforms that are similar to those worn by today’s Mexican federal police, the filmic security forces wear no flags on their sleeves, so as to implicate that they too are private security forces, and/or the direct employees of Del Rio. As Brown argues, under neoliberalism the state is placed in the “direct service” of the economy (7).

Whereas Novaro film’s the Mexican state as a corrupt and deteriorating institution, in Rivera’s Mexico, the state either permits or is forced to allow Del Rio security agents to kill designated terrorists with impunity, and televised popular support. However, the scene in which Rudy kills Memo’s father establishes historical links between the use of militarized security forces to protect “Del Rio’s assets” that are
portrayed as under attack by the “aqua terrorist” organization the Mayan Water Liberation Army, (Ejercito maya de la liberación del agua), and the U.S. history of military neo-imperial violence in Iraq. In other words, wherein Rivera’s film posits a strong critique of neoliberalism, given its future temporality, it directs its criticism at the private enterprises (Del Rio), the U.S. –State’s relation via the security forces and the active visual consumption, via television, of the militarized spectacle.

As we watch Memo and his brother watch the T.V. show “Drones” on television, positioned between una chanchada, a “Trunode” advertisement, and the shot of a ridiculous talking French-fry, “Drones” features an on-camera interview with Rudy, who explains to viewers how his history has lead him to this moment. As he explains, his parents were in the military; his comment is matched by a photograph of a young boy atop his father’s shoulders, as part of the television show’s diesis. The father wears the recognizable camouflage uniform from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In addition to positioning Del Rio’s headquarters in San Diego, the “Drone’s” title page on the show uses the U.S. flag as its background, further situating the security apparatus within the U.S. nation-state’s history and territory.

In addition, in some of the scenes that feature the voices of the pilots that remotely operate the drones in the film, Rivera utilized audio archives from the U.S.-Iraq war as scripts that were then followed by actors’ voices. In particular, Rivera used the footage and audio-become-script from the Wikileaks July 2007 video that captured U.S. aircrew in Apache helicopters gunning down what would be revealed as civilians. Therefore, Rivera not only creates a filmic representation of U.S. centered military
violence, but actually mined the archives of the mediatized Iraq war so as to formally suture the film’s images with the historical present and past. As Rivera told spectators in an interview in Tucson, Arizona following a screening of the film, ‘most of the aerial drone images and bombardment images were real images that were taken from the internet’. Therefore, through his film, Rivera sutures the U.S. military’s use of drones and remote surveillance and warefare with the U.S.-Mexico future. As Rivera poignantly and cleverly pointed out to his Tucson audience, the drone images and bombardment images are part of the U.S. public domain, “one way or another, you paid for them. So when you pay your taxes you pay for the bombing. So the images of it, you own. Congratulations” (Rivera “Tucson”).

In this way, through the use of documentary and “real” video, as Rivera refers to it, Rivera interpolates and signals directly the spectator positioned within the U.S., i.e. the U.S. taxpayer. As he further describes the use of the audio and video archives, Rivera notes that his film is not, at least in its entirety, fantasy, wherein he attempts to signal the real lives behind “those pixels” (Rivera “Tucson”). Furthermore, the re-deployment of these images in this filmic critique also serves to problematize the role of the State and spectator as member of the State, especially vis-à-vis the supposed passive positioning of Border Wars “observational doc” style, as Mary Culpepper referred to it.

The connections are also suggested in the editing of the film. In particular, Rivera seems together sequences that feature Memo’s brother watching the television show “Drones”, on an earlier occasion than the day of the father’s killing, with Memo

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73 As Rivera also notes, per his lawyer’s legal advice, he had to have actors re-perform the audio as the audio of this public domain footage is owned by the soldiers.
intercepting the drone’s audio signal. The spectatorship of state sanctioned violence is further connected to the history of U.S. colonization and imagination in a shot that features Memo’s brother flipping through channels on his flat-screen television, which is positioned against the open air backdrop of the hut in which their mother prepares tortillas. As Memo extradiegetically comments, in his narrating voice over, his brother was an addict to high-definition gringo television, his comment is visually matched to a close shot of the television on which a mid-twentieth century (color) “cowboy and indian” film plays. The short sequence allows just enough time for the cowboy to shoot the “Indian” off his horse, which is interrupted by the channel change to “Drones”.

Here too Rivera makes use of the embedded visual formatting, adding even greater signifying depth to the image. As the flag unfurls, three people dash across the flag, followed by the “Drones” title in cross-hairs. The outlines of three running people are none other than the infamous image of the family crossing the street that has been used in road signs by the California Department of Transportation in San Diego that controversially warned of immigrants crossing the busy roadways. If as Debord suggested that the “détournement” or plagiarizing “language of anti-ideology” (Debord 208) was a method for awakening spectators to their passive consumption of the spectacle (Mirzoeff 266), this sequence can be read as Rivera’s filmic intervention in the consumption of the security spectacle, effectively re-linking its discursive construction of terrorist with the historical fear and discursive construction of menacing Latin American migrants in the U.S.
Rivera further satirizes the televised security spectacle through the use of its announcer who proclaims “every night on ‘Drones’, we take you live to the front lines” Where hi-tech heroes use cutting edge technology “to blow the hell out of the bad guys”. The direct language of the announcer, and the use of “bad guys” contributes to the satirical image, which Memo’s brother celebrates with a fist-pumping “¡a huevo!”.

Rivera also uses color changes to differentiate between the distinct environments. In Santa Ana del Rio, the shots are gold-filtered to give them a yellow tone, whereas the reality T.V. shots are filmed in a clearer cool blue-transparent palette, so as to mark the difference between the earthy tones and life in Oaxaca, and the sterile environment of the Del Rio security headquarters, from where “Drones” is filmed. In the shot that matches ‘blowing the hell out of the bad guys’, “Drones” shows a shot of a house being blown up. The house and its surroundings are sepia yellow, thereby foreshadowing Memo’s father’s death and the location of the purported “bad guys” and “aqua terrorists”.

We see in Sleep Dealer a visual representation and critique of the visual strategies that are often deployed in Border Wars and HSUSA. The use of the T.V. show as one of the visual vehicles through which Rivera films the father’s death by Rudy’s virtual hand also serves to highlight the caesure that exists between the remote warrior and his or her victims, that is similarly matched with the cognitive distance between the show’s spectators and the victims. The scene, through its contrasts, also serves to portray the real life beyond the pixels. In the sequence in which Rudy kills Memo’s father, Memo and his brother watch the set-up to the act unfold on a television. The “Drones” announcer, speaks enthusiastically as he describes the program and its motivations:
This show contains depictions of Graphic violence against evil doers. If you have any young children at home, you won’t want them to miss it. The southern sector water supply is in constant crisis. And dams all around the world are a security risk for the companies that build them. They often come under attack by legions of aqua terrorists. Like the Mayan Army of Water Liberation. So the companies fight back.

On the show, the blacked out silhouette of the studio audience cheers and is invited to identify with Rudy the pilot, as he tells his story about his parents’ history as soldiers. The use of the silhouette of the anonymous mass of the studio audience highlights how the voyeuristic gaze is adopted by the spectators, and how the show’s cues invite the spectators to identify with Rudy the pilot, ultimately commodifying their gaze (Mirzoeff 15). The distinction between the impersonal distanced voyeuristic viewing position and the familiar and personal identification with the imagined terrorist is further marked as Memo and his brother panic at the site of an aerial photograph of Memo’s radio—which is defined by the T.V. show as a link with the Mayan Water Liberation Army. (The fact that Rivera creates a parallel between today’s EZLN with the filmed EMLA is a point to which I will return later in this analysis).

The sequence of shots also contrasts the show’s discursive invention of the “terrorist” via the announcer’s description of the aqua terrorists, and the show’s visual shots of a masked activist, and a dam being blown up, with a close shot of Memo’s consternated face. While the “Drones” studio audience actively accepts the televised definition of the enemy, as a possible terrorist, (as did Memo’s brother during previous
episodes), this time, Memo’s face, and his brother’s panic, reveal the humanity and mis-match between the official-commercial discourse and the human reality. The distinction is further constructed between the official televised discourse and its contrast with the brother’s response, as well as with the actual source of the possible terrorism: “¡No mames! Es tu pinche radio!”, demonstrating how Memo’s homemade hacking radio is designated as evidence of a terrorist threat to the assets of the Del Rio Corporation. Through these images and audio, the scene also mimics the fatal disconnect between the Bush Administration’s formal claims to have had evidence of “weapons of mass destruction”, and the on-the-ground absences of such weaponry. The linkages to the discourse and practice of U.S. Global War on Terror is further appropriated and critiqued by Rivera through the use of the real audio recordings from the Iraq war, so as to connect the “Drones” spectators with the spectators of the U.S. wars abroad. The U.S. interventions in the Middle-East and the Global War on Terror are further indexed by Rivera when the announcer refers to the targets as “evil doers”, appropriating George W. Bush’s infamous language.

Rivera’s portrayal of the Del Rio Security Headquarters and Rudy as the sanctioned soldiers who are able to kill suspected aqua terrorists with full impunity and popular televised support, works to visualize what Duggan calls the ruse of neoliberalism, and as is similarly argued by Harvey (Brief History), Brown and Ong “Neoliberalism as Exception”, in that what is purported as an economic program is in reality a neo-imperial project that is forged via military coercion and violence. Brown elaborates:
neo-liberalism does not conceive either the market itself or rational economic behavior as purely natural. Both are constructed -- organized by law and political institutions, and requiring political intervention and orchestration. Far from flourishing when left alone, the economy must be directed, buttressed, and protected by law and policy as well as by the dissemination of social norms designed to facilitate competition, free trade, and rational economic action on the part of every member and institution of society. (4)

Rivera also makes filmically visible Ong’s argument that for many neoliberalism implies a radicalized capitalist imperialism that is tied to lawlessness and military action. Rivera takes up the dominant themes of critiques of NAFTA and the neoliberal arrangement between the U.S. and Mexico, such as Saldaña-Portillo’s argument that the dominant discourse of NAFTA constitutes a “fiction of development”. *Sleep Dealer* also visualizes the inclusion via exclusion of the Mexican citizen laborer, as well as the States’ roles in shaping the conditions that induce increases in corporate profits, that rely upon the lowering of price of labor, often carried out by passing on costs to the laborers themselves.

Rivera traces the path of capitalist exploitation particularly through Memo’s character. In portraying Memo as dispossessed of his means of reproduction, (his subsistence farm) and thereby converted into an exploitable wage earner, as a worker in the infomaquilas (Martín Cabrera 585), Rivera uses the filmic text to position him as the subject whose “future is sacrificed” for the corporate profit of Del Rio. Memo’s mobility,
induced by both a dream to escape from Santa Ana del Rio and to acquire greater levels of participation in the globalized economy is ultimately motivated by the necessity to escape the conditions the arrangement has provoked, particularly the threat to his family’s survival. Here too Rivera makes visible that which is disappeared by the “fiction of development” wherein as opposed to imagining workers as moving freely to places of greater wage earning potential, and desiring to do so, rather, they are forced to migrate due to the socio-political-economic conditions induced by the very neoliberal dispositif. In his interview with Mark Engler in “Science Fiction from Below” Rivera himself describes this view of immigration:

When I look at dramas of immigration, one of the things that I find unsatisfying is that they always focus on an internal dream, a dream that someone has of going to America and making his or her life better. And, instead, what I wanted SD to start with was this idea that immigrants from Latin America, in the places where they’re born, are usually living somehow in the shadow of U.S. intervention, that immigrants come here because we – the United States—are already there. (6)

Along these lines Memo is much like the robotic Transformer described by Bould. In his study of Science Fiction films that treat neo-colonial and neoliberal times, Bould notes that

[w]ithin the dialectics of mobility and confinement, they [Transformers] can go apparently anywhere but only on command. In many ways, they exemplify the kind of labour force demanded by ‘the new spirit of
capitalism’: like a Transformer, the worker must be ‘adaptable and flexible, able to switch from one situation to a very different one, and adjust to it; and versatile, capable of changing activity or tools, depending on the nature of the relationship entered into with others or with objects’ (Boltanski and Chiapello: 112). (190)

Here we observe how Memo, much like Aurelia, demonstrates his flexibility and mobility by uprooting himself from Oaxaca and travelling near to the very source of his neo-colonial exploitation. Memo’s physical adaptations also signal a logical extreme to this flexibility.

Furthermore, in the world of Sleep Dealer, workers must still leave their homes and migrate to centers of “cyber production” to sell their labor, often leaving behind their families. In spite of the technological advances in this futuristic world, presumably to keep costs down, infomaquilas are still positioned on the northern border, presumably to take advantage of low property rents and other legal and economic accommodations provided by the location. In order to become a part of the cyber-laboring class, Memo must bear the upfront costs of node injection, a process through which he is robbed of his money. Ultimately, Luz reveals that she too is a trained coyotec and adorns Memo’s body with the nodes, nonetheless in an effort to get closer to Memo, so as to upload his story—her memories of Memo-- to “True-Node”. In keeping with the language of immigration, the term and performance of the coyotecos, works in parallel with the popular understanding of “coyotes” or immigrant smugglers that are known to take great advantage of their “clients”/ “pollos”. Here too, Luz, while ultimately developing a
relationship with Memo, nonetheless betrays him, selling her recollections of his memories to Rudy. In so doing, Rivera demonstrates how in the time/space world of *Sleep Dealer*, affect and memories are tradable commodities sold and consumed via cyberspace.

On one level, Luz betrays Memo through the sale of her narration of his story, usurping his power to control the discourse about his history. On the broader diachronic level, Memo recovers his position as narrator, as the film is narrated by Memo himself. Despite the film’s activist critique of neoliberalism and its final visualization of resistance and possible communal futures, the gendered structure of the narrative remains within the Hollywood and Mexican national cinema traditional gender expectations, wherein the final denouement provides a “happy ending”, in which Memo and Luz reconcile. On this element of Rivera’s filmic structure, Martín Cabrera notes that Rivera not only reproduces the heteronormative expectations of classic film structure, or what he refers to as “classical heterosexist format of Hollywood” (594), but perhaps more problematically, that *Sleep Dealer’s* “Oedipal quest reproduces some deep-seated colonial stereotypes about Mexican indigenous women. Luz is not only constructed as a motherly figure, but she also falls into the longstanding tradition of “malinchismo,” for initially she betrays Memo by selling his memories […] More importantly, this framework contributes to perpetuating the invisibility of one of the most salient features of labor in the borderlands: the fact that it is disproportionately carried out by women (Iglesias Prieto, Bacon)” (595).

The character Luz is quite similar to Marilú in *Sin dejar huella* wherein both
initially betray their partners for their own individual interests, demonstrating through film the fragmenting power of money on the family, as well as creating a visual image of members of the middle-upper classes taking advantage of their lower-class companions. I find Luz’s class position to also be similarly parallel with that of Marilú’s, wherein Luz demonstrates an exoticized or romanticized fantasy-gaze towards Memo’s humble roots. Her desire for “el pueblo”, as Saldaña-Portillo describes it, and her drive to exploit it, is evident in a scene in which Memo and Luz sit near the cement bottomed drainage river in Tijuana where she prys him for information on his father. As Memo describes his Father, through noneother than his agricultural production, he comments that they used to grow corn and beans.

LUZ. Cuéntame de él. Dime qué hacía.

MEMO. Nada especial. Teníamos unos plantillos de maíz, y frijol.

To this comment, Luz responds with curiosity and energy that is highlighted by the close shot of her face and her fascinated response: “¡Tenía una milpa!” From Luz’s viewing and subject position, a “milpa” seems like a romantic pre-modern concept. Memo, on the other hand, reponds almost surprised, laughing at her excitement over what for him is seemingly mundane, as was earlier filmed in the shots where he begrudgingly watered plants in his family plot. Her distance from Memo’s reality is further highlighted when she tells him that she knows about “milpas” because she once read about how the beans grow around the corn stalks, and that the two plants grow together. “…y las dos matas se llevan a crecer, verdad?”. While there is nothing particularly wrong with romanticizing
subsistence agriculture, it is notable that it is through Luz that this perspective is filmed, as in the final denoument there is a return to subsistence farming.

Along these lines, I find Luz to be quite similar with Marilú who also shared a fascination with pre-hispanic Mayan culture. Although Marilú’s Yucatec Maya-Castillian Spanish bilingualism perhaps more exquisitely aligns her with the figure of La Malinche, it is nonetheless Luz who, in this futuristic Mexico in which all characters apparently understand English, also serves as an interpreter between Rudy and Memo, gathering Memo’s memories and translating them into her own memories so as to upload and sell to Rudy, and/or any other willing buyer. Luz’s fascination with what she views as temporal as opposed to class differences is further highlighted when Memo learns about her profession. Opening a file named “Maricela” in her TruNode account, Luz explains how she met her friend, and how when she traveled with her to her town: “Me llevó a su pueblo. Era como hacer un viaje en el tiempo. Entra un mundo completamente nuevo, distinto para mí. Y quise compartir lo que había visto. Entonces subí el recuerdo… y se vendió.” In so doing, Luz finds a way to exploit, the immaterial, which are Memo’s thoughts, (Memo’s memories), or her friend’s lifestyle, further contributing to the images of cognitive production and capital portrayed by Rivera.

Martín Cabrera examines how Rivera films the capitalistic terms of this arrangement through the use of the “Sleep Dealers”, arguing that Rivera’s film, particularly through the concept and visualization of the infomaquilas, demonstrates how, as opposed to creating spaces that liberate and/or are innately escapable from capital’s
calculations and entrapments, that capitalism is just as adept at exploiting cognitive production as it is industrial or agricultural production.

Martín Cabrera puts Rivera’s film in dialog with what he refers to as “post-autonomous thinkers such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Maurizio Lazzarato, and others” (583). “According to these thinkers, under the new wave of financial capitalism, labor has become immaterial and capitalism has become more dependent on cognitive processes in order to enclose external labor and material and symbolic commons” (583). In particular, Martín Cabrera takes issue with what these theorists see as the emancipating potentials of cognitive labor due to capitalism’s difficulty in enclosing the cognitive commons, noting that these “post-autonomous thinkers”, including Moulier Boutang cite copyright disputes and patent cases “as evidence of the incapacity of capitalism to enclose these new commons and to appropriate the labor of the ‘general intellect’” (588). As Martín Cabrera describes their assessments, the failure or difficulty in capitalizing cognitive processes signals potential failure for capitalism in its entirety:

… for Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, and for a great number of neo-Marxist thinkers such as Maurizio Lazzarato, Yann Moulier Boutang, Carlos Vercellone, and others, the current enclosure of the commons signals the transformation of capital into rent-capital and the potential collapse of the entire capitalist regime of property and accumulation. (585)

In particular, Martín Cabrera intervenes in this discussion on the revolutionary potentialities of this “failed encloser”, arguing that Hart and Negri, in particular, make an epistemic leap wherein they link capitalism’s difficulty in enclosing the cognitive
commons to the “immanent (or should we say natural) advent of a revolutionary end of capitalist exploitation” (589). It is on this last point that Martín Cabrera draws on Sleep Dealer as a creative project that visualizes both the revolutionary, as well as exploitable potentials of cognitive labor and processes.

What interests me about Rivera’s futuristic musings is that he establishes a dialogue with post autonomous thinkers, while exposing the limits of their assumptions by showing how technology and cognitive labor may actually reproduce forms of colonial exploitation and oppression rather than leading to automatic liberation from the shackles of physical labor. (590)

Indeed, it is through the portrayal of workers selling their physical and cognitive labor through the infomaquilas that Rivera most poignantly depicts what I see as the neoliberal arrangement’s potential for exploitation and subalternization. Rivera utilizes the built environment in relation to its geographical position as well as the physicality of the cognitive labor to emphasize the relationship between the contemporary U.S.-Mexico neoliberal relationship and its potential future.

Rivera emphasizes the uneven development that is characteristic of late and neoliberal capitalism in a variety of shots and sequences. For example, when Memo gets his nodes, he narrates “Por fin pude conectar mi sistema nervioso al otro sistema—la economia global.” His voice over is matched first with a digital liquid like blue-green image of synapses, used to imitate the electronic and somatic nervous system circuit, and then Rivera matches “la economia global” with an establishing shot of the shanty towns. The shot initiates with a close up of a rusty metal door frame and then rack focuses to the
background of the shot, revealing the shanties in the distance. The sepia colored sequence features a quick series of three shots, each a long shot of different shanties in the colonia, followed by a medium-close of Memo that reveals the viewing position of the shanty town is indeed his own. “En la colonia donde vivía, en las afueras de la ciudad, estaban las infomaquilas, los sleep dealers.” In keeping with the genre’s expectations, sci-fi is always already a development story, in this case a story of uneven development.

Rivera employs the contrast of colors and language to emphasize the semantic and real distance between particular signifiers (such as high-tech and global economy) and their signified—underscoring that which the “fiction of development” elides in order to constitute itself. The sequence of shots of Memo’s colonia, and Memo’s story, combine to create a filmic representation of the ‘transformation of the lives of those displaced subalerns under neoliberalism’ (Saldaña-Portillo 759). Furthermore, as Martín Cabrera notes, in Sleep Dealer, Rivera portrays the complete compatibility of high-tech appurtenances with poverty and exploitation (591). This “paradox”, as Martín Cabrera refers to it, allows Rivera to ultimately demonstrate how it is the human usage of the technologies at hand that determines whether they constitute medicine or poison.

Rivera sutures the present U.S.-Mexico labor relation with that of his futuristic portrayal in the Infomaquilas. When Memo arrives to work in the “Sleep Dealers”, the manager gives him and the other workers a tour of the facility, explaining what the other laborers are doing. In the blue toned low-lit cylindrical building, each worker is attached to the glowing blue node wires, wears an oxygen mask and contact lenses that allow them to view their distant worksites. The workers move about, their physical movements that
look like mimicry or charades are actually controlling robots on the other side of the border. Rivera utilizes a mirror on the set, (not obviously) so as to create an infinity view of the workers, highlighting the limitlessness of the exploitative relationship.

As the manager gives the tour, he tells Memo and the other new node worker that one of the women is a babysitter in Washington, while one of the men works at a meat processing plant in Iowa. Rivera employs the manager’s narration to bring home the socio-economic gaze of the film: “Este es el sueño Americano. Le damos a los Estados Unidos lo que siempre han querido, todo el trabajo, sin los trabajadores”. Given NAFTA’s intentional silence on labor, or what I call its inclusion via exclusion of migrant labor, here Rivera films one extreme possibility of that very relation. Where as Duggan emphasizes how neoliberal planning has lowered both production costs as well as the burden of the state by further relegating the costs of social reproduction and unpaid labor further downward, most notably through channels of difference, *Sleep Dealer* demonstrates what the extreme world of that directionality looks like, making Mexican labor available to transnational companies while freeing the States and the transnationals of the costs of reproduction, such as education and healthcare.

This regime is constructed as all-inclusive while still working through channels of difference, as we see in the slightly more privileged lives of Luz and Rudy. Luz sells her memories of others, commodifying and betraying her subjects, in order to pay off her student loans on which she has defaulted—she too has had to bear the costs of her social reproduction, but she also passes them on to her subject. And Rudy, as we see, in his simple middle-class family home, makes his living by working for the military-industrial
complex. In the *Sleep Dealer* world, all subjects have been interpolated as laborers, selling their cognitive or affective labor at the expense of others.

While Martín Cabrera cites Rivera’s maintainance of the gendered division of labor in the film, particularly in the Sleep Dealers where María is a babysitter and José butchers animals in Iowa, as a limitation of the film. Another possible interpretation could be that given that in the *Sleep Dealer* world exploitation is still working through channels of difference, it would therefore be anachronistic to the film’s temporality to create a neo-colonial environment marked by gender equality—too utopic for this dystopic environment. That said, the film does construct Luz in a way that is still much more in line with Mulvey’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” woman of classic cinema that also serves to unite the male protagonists of the film. Furthermore, given that Memo is the narrator of the story, he is presented as what Mulvey refers to as the “bearer of look” inviting the spectator to identify with him through his gaze.

In terms of the gendered limitations of the film, Rivera does also reproduce through Luz, as the unifier of Rudy and Memo, a similar construction to what Mary Jacobus, in “Is there a Woman in this Text?”, describes as the triangulation of two men and a woman, wherein the woman serves only to be the “mute sacrifice on which theory itself may be founded; the woman is silenced so that the theorist can make the truth come out of her mouth” (118). While Luz is not mute, and she does have an active role in the film’s denouement, using her node skills to assist in the attack on the dam, she nevertheless serves as the bridge that unites Rudy and Memo.

Returning to the Rivera’s imaginary of the near future, he highlights through Memo
and the infomaquilas the exploitative nature of the arrangement. In particular, Memo and the laborers make visible that which is attempted to be disappeared in the “American Dream” of neoliberalism and NAFTA—the human laborer. Rivera also emphasizes physical and material labor, in spite of what seems like the infomaquilas immateriality. Rather than working in immaterial labor,74 Rivera constructs Memo and the other workers as practicing material labor—Memo operates a construction robot—it’s just that in this arrangement the cybraceros are ever more exquisitely alienated from their production. In other words, Memo’s labor is not immaterial, but he is alienated from the materiality of his labor.

Given that the maquiladora industry is the architectural result of capitalism’s drive to annihilate space through time, the infomaquilas are an extreme structure for compressing space and time. As Bould describes this characteristic of neoliberal capitalism: “Because neoliberalism claims that ‘the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions’, the development and use of information technologies – able to ‘accumulate, store, transfer, analyse, and use massive databases to guide decision in the global marketplace’ – has been central to cementing neoliberal hegemony (Harvey 2005: 3)” (Bould 182). On one level, the infomaquilas compress space and time, through the development of what Sharon Zukin refers to as “transactional space”, or cognitive space, through the electronic transmission of labor, overcoming while maintaining the distance the worker must travel to his or her worksite. However in Sleep Dealer, in the case of the infomaquilas, the since the workers are

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74 “Lazzarato defined immaterial labor as the type of activity responsible for producing the informational and cultural content of commodities” (Martin Cabrera 586)
selling both their cognitive and physical labor, to produce material outputs (buildings, butchered meat, etc.) the time-space problem still exists for delivering products to market. What is compressed to the point of suture is the production and the social reproduction of the worker. As Martín Cabrera describes the infomaquilas in which Memo and the other laborers work until the point of exhaustion and/or until they are blinded, mamed or killed by the equipment: “There is no outside of production and reproduction within the logic of the infomaquilas; they provide living labor to the other side of the border 24/7, because they cannot ship more hours to the other side” (593).

Martín-Cabrera also views the world of Sleep Dealer as marked by neocolonialism, where Rivera’s cybraceros effectively “pierce the aura of cyberfetishism” (593) revealing the neocolonial extension of the working day to its outer limits. Like machinery in the era of industrial capitalism, new technology ‘sweeps away every moral and natural restriction on the length of the working day’ so that ‘the most powerful instrument for reducing labor time [the machine], suffers a dialectical inversion and becomes the most unfailing means of turning the whole lifetime of the worker and his family into labor-time at capital’s disposal for its own valorization’ (Marx, Capital 532). The cybernetic connection through nodes in the film shows only an intensification of this ‘dialectical inversion’ (593).

Per this arrangement, the product seems to carry greater value than the producer; the child, the steak, and the building have greater physicality and presence than the babysitter, worker and butcher. In order to intervene in the “disappearance” of the
cybracero, the future extension of the neoliberal laborer, Rivera films from the perspective of the worker, and highlights the impossibility of fully removing the physical laborer, while all the while demonstrating the exploitative potentialities of the attempt.

In the film, Rivera highlights how in spite of the physical distance that alienates the worker from his or her production, the burden of production rests on the physical/social reproduction of the worker. Rivera realizes in film what Ong refers to as one of the “exceptions to neoliberalism” where “The low-skilled migrant worker is subjected to both labor and ethnic disciplining that is integrated into virtual self-governing ethnic enclaves largely unregulated by the labor law” (131 Neoliberalism as Exception). The former node workers that live in Memo’s dilapidated “neighborhood” are partially or fully blinded from their previous work in the infomaquilas. Rivera also films a scene in which a worker is electrocuted while working: most errors and short circuits in the system flow towards the worker who will physically and economically pay the price of the malfunction. This is even further highlighted in the scene in which Memo collapses from exhaustion on the job, and the computer notifies him that his wage will be docked to reflect the lost labor time. Only when physically plugged in and moving, are the workers being paid.

Rivera also situates Memo’s physical sacrifice within the economic realm of the migrant, wherein his heath deteriorates as he continues to send remittances to his family in Oaxaca. This is underscored in a video chat between Memo and his mother, who notes his exhausted condition, while also remarking that they wouldn’t be able to survive without him, i.e. his remittances. Like the migrant class in the U.S. today, Rivera
constructs Memo as driven by his desire to maintain his family, in spite of its physical cost.

Martín Cabrera argues that he uses the term neo-colonial to describe the labor arrangement in *Sleep Dealer*, because it reflects how capitalism’s exploitative actions have consistently been carried out through channels of difference. “In order to transform living labor into dead objectified labor, capitalism—from its original entanglement with slavery and colonialism onward—has continually mobilized class, race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, national and regional identities, and any other form of oppression at its disposal in order to smooth the process of accumulation via the extraction of labor and its cyclical reproduction” (594). Rivera also seems to make this filmic connection wherein he eludes to Eduardo Galeanos’s *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, and connects the neo-colonized Memo with the similarly exploited natural resources of Oaxaca. This is shown in a sequence that connects visuals of Memo’s blood stream to a shot of the water pipeline that extracts Santa Ana del Rio’s water. This is further indexed as Memo narrates “¿Cómo le iba a decir la verdad? Si yo apenas lo estaba descubriendo. Me estaban drenando la energía, y mandándola lejos. Lo que le pasó al río”.

**Cyber-rebellion and Unification**

In order to contextualize the film’s denouement and the unification of Rudy, the Chicano, with Memo, the dispossessed lower-class worker, and victim of neoliberal violence, and Luz the middle-class writer/coyotec, we must consider how Rivera portrays the potentialities of technology throughout the film. Memo’s hacking serves as both as an initial motivator for conflict, and final resolving solution to the complicating factors of
the narrative. Memo’s hacking initially and in the final denouement, disturbs, interrupts and reveals fissures in the theater of hegemony of the militarized and privatized management of space and information, when he intercepts the Del Rio security signal. However, so as to maintain its hegemonic position, the securitization system that relies on its spectacular mediatization, i.e. “Drones” to demonstrate how it both manages and surveys life, ultimately administering punishment with impunity in order to maintain its dominance. However, in the film’s final sequence, Memo’s hacking skills, Rudy’s pilot skills and biometric\(^75\) permissions, and Luz’s node modification skills are brought together to blow open the weak seem that holds together the “transnational system of capitalist exploitation and biopolitical control” (Martín Cabrera 595).

Rivera situates Memo’s abilities and actions, and therefore the film itself, within a larger context of political “hacktivism” in relation to the neoliberalism. In particular he directly references the University of California at San Diego’s Electronic Disturbance Theater and its history of hacktivism related to both the U.S.-Mexico border and the Zapatista uprising, under the direction of Ricardo Dominguez. “Hacktivism” is defined by Elizabeth Losh as: “the nonviolent use of digital tools in pursuit of political ends” (163). In the first scene in which the viewer sees Memo’s shed and hacking equipment, a series of close shots feature the computer equipment he works with, its flashing red lights and a book titled *Hackear para principiantes* de R. Dominguez, followed by a medium shot of Memo, creating a visual link between Dominguez and Memo. Dominguez,

\(^{75}\) For further discussion on Sleep Dealer’s representation of biometrics and the U.S.-Mexico border see Javier Duran “Virtual Borders, Data Aliens, and Bare Bodies: Culture, Securitization, and the Biometric State.”
Professor of Visual Studies at UCSD, is a former member of the Critical Art Ensemble, known among other things for its book *Electronic Civil Disobedience and Other Unpopular Ideas* (1996) and is a co-founder of the Electronic Disturbance Theater, along with Carmin Karasic, Brett Stalbaum, and Stefan Wray. Among its “rap sheet” of activities, The Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), notably organized virtual protests against Ernesto Zedillo’s official website, and also held the first pro-Zapatista on-line demonstration. As Losh describes it:

> Visitors might see images of masked rebels and the FloodNet branding with a message suggesting, “Use the applet below to send your own message to the error log of the institution/symbol of Mexican Neo-Liberalism of your choice” (Electronic Disturbance Theater). No actual damage to the computer infrastructure of the sites or to their security mechanisms was caused by these actions. As one website explaining Floodnet describes, the intent was merely ‘to disrupt access to the targeted website by flooding the host server with requests for that website’. (168)

The EDT is also known for having developed the Transborder Migrant Tool (TBT), which involves repurposing affordable cell phones into global positioning tools that indicate paths across the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as the locations of water and humanitarian aid. As Losh describes it, the TBT demonstrates how ‘existing technologies can be retasked’ turning “old phones into life-saving GPS devices with easy-to-read digital compasses. According to Dominguez, the global migrant under-class that is unable to afford so-called smart phones would no longer be “outside of this emerging
grid of hyper-geo-mapping-power” and the harsh reality of the border landscape could be digitally augmented to promote a different form of politics (“Transborder Immigrant Tool” 169).

It is from within this ideological environment that *Sleep Dealer* visualizes how global communications, mapping and even explosives can be redeployed to more socialist, environmental and communitarian ends, to return the commons to the people. Furthermore, what is also pushed into the field of debate is who has the power to access, control and or exist and interact with in both the physical geographies of particular terrains as well as the digital territories of cyberspace. Rivera puts forth an imaginary of possible futures that unites the Zapatista Rebellion with the hacktivism that characterizes the EDT. Along these lines, Rivera suggests how hacktivism might be a strategy utilized by the less-powerful.

This is visualized in number of ways. For example, when Memo surrepticiously lets Luz and Rudy into the infomaquilas building, he uses the code “994” to open the door. I read “994” as representative of 1994, the year of the Zapatista Rebellion, as well as the year that NAFTA was initiated. Therefore, taking up the cause, if not the tools, of the Zapatista Rebellion, the three appropriate the space, originally designed to exploit physical and cognitive labor, in order to transform it into the cyber-battle station through which they launch their attack against the Santa Ana del Río dam. The link to the Zapatistas is further underscored as the three take up the activist duties of the “EMLA” portrayed throughout the film.

Martín Cabrera argues that unification of Rudy and Memo is poltically significant
in that the “gesture […] proposes a much-needed transnational alliance between Chican@s and Mexicans in order to resist neocolonial capitalist exploitation and military control on both sides of the border” (595). While Martín Cabrera argues that the film’s denoument does not reproduce a “nostalgic return to a pristine national origin” (595), however, Martín Cabrera fails to include Luz’s activities as node-tech and unifier of the two men in the outcome. Given that Luz had earlier expressed her fascination with milpa subsistence growing, and how the dam’s destruction as well as the final shots of Memo watering his own little milpa in the shanty towns of Tijuana connote nevertheless a “nostalgic return” or perhaps a move towards subsistence farming. The denouement nonetheless is far from utopic, wherein the larger socio-economic structure remains in place. However, given that Santa Ana’s resources have been returned to Santa Ana’s inhabitants, presumably to return local control to the production, in the larger dystopic imaginary of the neoliberal dispositif, such changes constitute near utopias when viewed from a subaltern revolutionary perspective.

Most significantly, Sleep Dealer imagines a possible future that directly intervenes in the neoliberal dispositif. Rivera goes much further than simply visualizing the sacrifice of the subaltern to the neoliberal present and future, and imagines a communal project that sacrifices the neoliberal dispositif for the subaltern’s future, ultimately reversing, in film, the underside of neoliberalism’s fiction of development in Mexico. As Martín Cabrera argues “in the film, oppositional agency is not immanent to the development of the capitalist forces of production and their internal contradictions, as Negri and Hardt would want it. Rather, it is the result of a political decision to struggle
from within the system” (595).

As Memo waters his milpa, his voice over narration offers the final evaluation of the scenario: “tal vez haya un futuro para mí aquí a la orilla de todo, un futuro con un pasado, si me conecto y lacho”.

Conclusion

_Sleep Dealer_ and _Sin dejar huella_ visualize the unfolding of neoliberalism in Mexico, its roots, its possible futures, as well as possible alternatives. Within the context of debate about Post-NAFTA Mexican cinema (Sánchez-Prado and Hind) I argue that _Sin dejar huella_ and _Sleep Dealer_ are two films that belong in the filmmography of these debates. Both respond to Sánchez-Prado’s call for the visualization of the violence of neoliberalism, and _Sleep Dealer_ certainly “backs the odds for successful activism” as Hind posits.

Each film addresses, in its own way, the structural roots of neoliberalism in Mexico. _Sleep Dealer_’s approach is direct wherein it clearly states and shows how Del Rio Inc. has privatized and securitized what were previously the resources of the community in Oaxaca. Similarly, it takes advantage of its genre that allows it to imagine a possible future as the extreme (and not so extreme) extension of current processes and procedures. In many ways _Sleep Dealer_ is not as futuristic as it is presentient, and simply focuses the camera’s lens on the militarized neoliberal dispositif already in progress and how it is set to unfold. Perhaps the most radical futuristic utopian musing of the film is its resolution in which the Chicano soldier and the Oaxacan hacker, who through their
middle-class unifier (Luz), turn the arms of oppression and theft against the oppressor—
destroying Del Rio’s dam and returning the resources to the commons.

*Sin dejar huella’s* imaginations both in terms of present problems and possible
alternative futures are less direct than *Sleep Dealer’s*, but otherwise are still central
themes in the film. As I show throughout my analysis of the film, Novaro signals the
privatization of national-natural resources on a variety of occasions and couches these
instances within what is projected as a common motivator in the film—as Marilú
describes it—the drive to bring investment to Mexico in these globalized times. However,
this drive to foster investment in Mexico is filmed as the larger economic problem and
stage that characters respond to and move within. Neoliberalism, as it is imagined in both
*Sleep Dealer* and *Sin dejar huella*, is fraught with exceptions to be survived and
negotiated by the protagonists. While neither film ever voices the terms “NAFTA” or
“neoliberalism” in their dialogs, they are nevertheless visually indexed and referenced
throughout, as I have examined. The ways in which neoliberalism is approached and
imagined by both films tend to align with “neoliberalism as state form” and
“neoliberalism as policy and program” as described by Springer (citing Ward and
England). Along these lines, through the films’ protagonists, I find that both films cast
their main characters as economic actors within what Ong refers to as the “neoliberal
exception” that “pries open the seam between sovereignty and citizenship, generating
successive degrees of insecurity for low-skilled citizens and migrants who will have to
look beyond the state for the safeguarding of their rights” (*Neoliberalism as Exception*
19). Each protagonist responds to the elements of insecurity in their lives as well as to the
demands of neoliberal economics in ways that allow viewers to contemplate the relationships between them, their migrations and the broader socio-economic structure.

Within the context of this present study and its examination of visual culture of the U.S. - Mexico neoliberal relationship, these films emerge as sites for the imagination and contestation of the unfolding of neoliberalism in Mexico. While these narrative films are distinct in form from the non-fiction objects of visual culture that I examine in the other chapters of the dissertation, Sin dejar huella and Sleep Dealer nonetheless constitute visual narratives in which the lives of subaltern Mexicans, particularly as they are induced to migrate, are imagined and registered. Where Border Wars and the outdoor exploration magazines studied in the first and second chapters ultimately advocate for increasing militarization of the U.S. – Mexico border by imagining and disappearing particular kinds of border crossers and vigilant protectors, Sin dejar huella and Sleep Dealer disrupt and complicate these visual narratives put forth by the border spectacle by embodying, albeit in filmic form, those who are induced to migrate and drawn towards Mexico’s borders by virtue of the neoliberal relation. These visual emodiments provide opportunities for spectators to contemplate, and critically view, the relationships between these subaltern actors and the socio-political and socio-economic structures. Sin dejar huella interrogates the gendered qualities of these structures and Sleep Dealer aims more directly at the capitalization of the State. Both films posit and visualize a re-deployal of the tools of oppression. In the case of Sleep Dealer the arms of oppression and neoliberalization are used towards more socialistic ends, and in Sin dejar huella, the
women use the tools and skills on hand to turn their enemies against themselves allowing for an ultimate utopic and more cooperative escape.

As this study examines the human and representative side of borders, migrations and citizenships in visual culture, I argue that these filmic texts are powerful sites for imagination and contestation of the neoliberal dispositif as it is experienced in Mexico. *Sin dejar huella* and *Sleep Dealer* are two films that contribute to the development of particular kinds of political imaginaries as they relate to the U.S. and Mexico and understandings of their relationship. Through Aurelia, the maquila worker and the potential victim of feminicidio, Novaro creates a character who rejects the alienation from her production and social reproduction, and furthermore, who will not be ventriloquized, nor permit the violent theft of her agency, to use Schmidt-Camacho’s terminolgy. Through Memo, Rivera visualizes the migrant worker who is otherwise disappeared and/or criminalized in the neoliberal arrangement, “todo el trabajo, sin los trabajadores”. To see the lives and journeys of migrants and their families as they relate to the neoliberal dispositif is to disrupt that which is disappeared in the frontier scenario and the spectacle of detention and removal.

In my next chapter, I continue and conclude my examination of visual discourses of the U.S. and Mexican borders and migrations in the times and territories of NAFTA by analyzing how documentary film and television serve as sites of critical witnessing of the violence experienced during migratory journeys and in the militarized detention and removal processes, both in the U.S. and Mexico. I examine how documentaries utilize particular visual strategies in order to expose particular elements of migratory and
detention/deportation experiences and to render them visible for critique. This next chapter, “Documenting Abuse”, similar to the present chapter, examines objects of visual culture that attempt to see the neoliberal dispositif from the perspective of those who are included via their exclusion or as Eduardo Galeano might refer to them, “los jodidos”.

CHAPTER FOUR: DOCUMENTING ABUSE: CRITICAL WITNESSING IN DOCUMENTARY FILM: MIGRATION, DETENTION AND REMOVAL

In this concluding chapter, I examine how three documentaries attempt to present moments of critical witnessing within and through their filmic texts. Therefore, I posit that documentary film and television centered on violence suffered by migrants, during the migratory process, in the lived condition of deportability, and/or in detention and removal procedures, have the potential to visualize contestatory discourses, serve as loci of denunciations and constitute sites of critical witnessing. By way of concluding this dissertation, I examine visual moments within these texts that attempt to disrupt the imaginations put forth and disappeared in the border spectacle.

Wherein the visual spectacle of border security, detention and removal invites the spectator to view the embodied performance of neoliberalism and nativism by the security agents, who maintain and reproduce it through force, while simultaneously encouraging percepticide, making the physical and systemic violence suffered by migrants seemingly invisible therefore and resistant to critique, I argue that they ultimately invite the spectator to “collude with the violence around them” (Disappearing Acts 123). Following Taylor, I conclude that the border security spectacle of detention and removal calls for a critical witnessing on the part of many resistant spectators who must take up the responsibility of critically viewing, listening, remembering and reporting what he or she experiences, making visible that which has been rendered invisible by the spectacle.
One of the ways in which we can examine migration and experiences within neoliberalism is to analyze critical imaginations of these experiences, as captured in film. In the previous chapter, I examined how *Sleep Dealer* and *Sin dejar huella* visualize the unfolding of neoliberalism in Mexico, its roots, its possible futures, as well as possible alternatives. As I signal therein, these objects of visual culture offer critical views of the effects of neoliberalism (as policy and state form) on members of the lowest classes in Mexico and contemplate surviving, surrendering to and rebelling against the neoliberal model (as each film portrays it). Furthermore, both films posit Mexico’s borders, north and south, as key sites for the contemplation of the role of the state, the economy and the individual. I argue that these films can serve as formants of, as well as disruptions to, popular political imaginaries and understandings of lower-class workers, their migrations and their relationships to broader socio-political and economic structures, particularly in their Mexican context.

These visual embodiments provide opportunities for spectators to contemplate, and critically view, the relationships between these subaltern actors and the socio-political and socio-economic structures. As I draw on Aihwa Ong and Alicia Schmidt-Camacho throughout this dissertation, these films help make visible the distinct viewing positions and lived experiences of the North American neoliberal project—where for some it is understood as a package of state-sponsored free-market economic policies, for many others it implies experiences of insecurity, required mobility and flexibility and perhaps even the sacrifice of one’s present and/or future.
Just as the films examined in the third chapter offer critical views of migratory experiences and the unfolding of the North American neoliberal dispositif, in this concluding chapter, I look to documentary film and television as additional yet distinct sites for visualizing and contemplating the human side of borders and migration in visual culture.

**Critical Witnessing: A Visual Strategy for Reclaiming the Look**

In the first two chapters of this study, “The Frontera as Frontier” and “The Spectacle of Detention and Removal” I indicate that one of the key visual strategies that is employed in the production of the immigration spectacle in the U.S. is the creation and positioning of writers and cameras from the “native’s point of view” (De Genova Working the Boundaries). I have found visual culture to be a key site for the production of the “native’s point of view” because it provides a visual platform for the native, based on the qualification of being native, to decide what is best for the nation and to debate the place of the immigrant in the nation, and who should or should not be allowed to enter the space of the nation. I find that all of the objects of visual culture studied in chapters one and two produce and deploy the native’s point of view.

Another key visual strategy that is employed in these border spectacles is the production of the militarized gaze towards migrants and the border. This, as I have outlined, is also an invitation to spectators to take up the militarized gaze of the state, seeing the border and migrant through the eyes of the security agent and/or authorized explorer. As we saw in the third chapter, *Sleep Dealer* offers one example of a visual narrative that disrupts and critiques the militarized gaze of the State.
Wherein the spectacle of detention and removal and the larger border spectacle do show the suffering of migrants within the U.S. immigration regime, I argue that this suffering and violence is not traced nor tracked to its deeper structural roots within the neoliberal arrangement but rather is represented as yet another negative characteristic of the U.S.-Mexico border itself. Furthermore, I find that the visual narratives examined in the first two chapters effectively disappear and invite percepticide of the structural roots and complicated experiences of migration. Therefore, I have sought to identify objects of visual culture, visual narratives and visual strategies that can work to make visible the “human side” of immigration and/or visualize those whose present is sacrificed for, and/or are included via their exclusion by the North American neoliberal dispositif.

Along these lines, Slavoj Zizek’s tripartite of violence is useful for designating that which is made visible and/or seemingly invisible throughout these visual narratives. Zizek describes violence as composed of the subjective, systemic and symbolic. Subjective violence is perpetrated “by a clearly identified agent” (1). Zizek writes that the “signals of [subjective] violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict” (1). Subjective violence, that is the most visible kind of violence, however can distract from what Zizek identifies as objective violence, which he divides into the symbolic and systemic. He argues that “we need to step back in order to “perceive the contours of the background which generates such outbursts” to “identify a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and to promote tolerance” (1), that is the symbolic and systemic. Symbolic violence is described by Zizek as that which is embodied in language and its forms. “This violence is not only at work in the obvious—
and extensively studies—cases of incitement and of the relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms: these is a more fundamental form of violence still that pertains to language as such, to its imposition of a certain universe of meaning” (1). Systemic violence is then described as “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (1). Following Zizek’s line of reasoning, I would argue that systemic violence, i.e. the catastrophic consequences of the unfolding of the neoliberal dispositif, includes and also produces subjective violence, as Zizek argues—the systemic and symbolic are the generators of the subjective.

Visual Culture as both inhabitant and constituent of the symbolic has the possibility to disrupt and reproduce subjective and systemic violence. The border spectacle and the spectacle of detention and removal studied in the first two chapters tend to disappear and hide the systemic violence of the U.S.-Mexico neoliberal dispositif. I argue and find that the films studied in chapter three for example, while trapped within the symbolic and perhaps per Zizek’s assessment are always already violent, nevertheless attempt to address systemic violence and the relationships between systemic and subjective violence.

Furthermore, following Zizek I argue and conclude that the visual spectacle of detention and removal and border spectacle, as studied in the first two chapters, sustains these three forms of violence through their production, and/or disappearance, calls for what Nicholas Mirzoeff refers to “reclaiming the look”. I cite him at length:

Visual culture, every day, has to claim the right to look, to see the migrant, to visualize the war, to recognize climate change. In reclaiming that look,
it refuses to do the commodified labor of looking, of paying attention. It claims the right to be seen by the common as a counter to the possibility of being disappeared by governments. It claims the right to a secular viewpoint. Above all, it is the claim to a history that is not told from the point of view of the police. (An Introduction to Visual Culture 15)

But how are we to reclaim the look? One strategy, following Taylor, is that percepticide can be combated through critical witnessing where witnesses refuse to collude with the violence around them by reporting on what they have seen, in an attempt to open up the violence they have witnessed to critique, effectively making visible that which has been rendered invisible.

In the chapter “Caught in the Spectacle” in Disappearing Acts, Taylor contemplates the spectacle of violence enacted against the woman’s body in the performance of the play Paso de dos by Eduardo Pavlovsky and critically examines her own role as a spectator of what she calls a re-staging of the scenario of the destruction of the woman in the struggle to control the construction of the nation. Taylor analyzes the connection between her experience as a spectator of Paso de dos with the visibility and invisibility of military violence experienced by the Argentine population during the Dirty War. Finding that the violence re-staged in the play reproduces and aestheticizes the destruction of the woman, Taylor concludes that Paso de dos participates in, rather than critically challenges, a long standing tradition of a “brutal battle for national identity and power between men, which […] [has been] waged on the body of a Woman” (16).
In the first of three sections, “The Scene of the Crime”, Taylor describes her reaction to viewing the performance of *Paso de dos*, and asks “[w]hat did this graphic representation of sexual violence against the female body say about the Dirty War? What fantasies did it convey about Argentine nation-ness? What function was it performing for the enthralled audience? And what was my role there, anyway?” (2). Taylor determines that the eroticization of the rape in *Paso de dos* fails to criticize and demythify the masculine violence of the military, and instead serves to transform the pain of the tortured woman “into public pleasure and titillation” (7). Through this aestheticization Taylor argues that Pavlovsky re-produces and relies upon the same military discourse that was used in the Dirty War, which splits the “feminine” into the disembodied *Patria* and the physical, disposable woman (4). Taylor further argues that while Pavlovsky may claim that “She wins” by denying her torturer the pronouncement of his name, by casting the woman as an echo, the play recreates the military’s practice of silencing as opposed to empowering the woman as Pavlovsky claims.

In the section “Visibility/Invisibility”, Taylor contextualizes the play by looking at the desire to see and remember the atrocities of the Dirty War and how this desired visibility relates to the invisibility demanded by the military government. Recognizing how the play is representational of the artistic response to not forget, Taylor questions whether *Paso de dos* enables the spectator to manifest his or her desire to see all that was denied during the Dirty War or if instead the play re-creates percepticide: “the self-blinding of the general population” (123), which as Taylor argues was prevalent during the war. Taylor argues that making the visible destruction and humiliation of the woman
seemingly invisible, metaphorical, and resistant to critique *Paso de dos*, like the
detainments and disappearances, which were made to seem invisible, and encouraged the
blinding of the population, allows spectators to “collude with the violence around them”
(123). 76

Taylor finds that the re-staging and reliance upon the violence and misogyny that
marked the military actions during the Dirty War, reproduces the scenario prevalent in
Argentine history in which the construction of the nation is predicated on the destruction
of the woman. Taylor argues that the struggle for national identity and control in
Argentina in the twentieth century has been a battle between two groups of men, fought
on and through the feminine and feminized bodies. For Taylor, *Paso de dos* reproduces
this violence by constructing woman’s body as merely an object of exchange or the space
on and through which the males position themselves.77 Viewing *Paso de dos* through this
lens Taylor finds:

Only by controlling She, as Pavlovsky’s play makes clear, can he define
himself, either as the military man or as the progressive Argentine
intellectual. Violence against women, it seems, can miraculously do all at
once. It provides pleasure and identity for the male sacrificer-torturer. It
thrills the spectator. The image of the bleeding *Patria* once more unites

76 Furthermore, Taylor finds that this theatrical production reproduces a violent male gaze among its
spectators because they “are required to participate in the misogyny in order to reap the redemptive
dividend” (6). Aligned with Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Taylor finds that the
play leads the spectator to view the woman through the splitting male gazes that struggle to control “She”/
the nation.

77 Mary Jacobus in “Is there a Woman in this Text?” refers to this process as the triangulation of two men
and a woman, wherein one or both men use the woman in order to prove his argument. The woman serves
only to be the “mute sacrifice on which theory itself may be founded; the woman is silenced so that the
theorist can make the truth come out of her mouth” (118).
and uplifts the population and, besides, the ‘bitch’ (as the play calls her) is dead. (16-17)

Taylor is confronted with the challenge of communicating what she has witnessed. Therefore, Taylor attempts to “talk back” by performing the role of the “resistant spectator” (21). Taylor advocates utilizing her professional tools from performance, gender and Latin American studies to critically read spectacles, be they Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo or the play Paso de dos. While she recognizes the problematic nature of the term, Taylor equates resistant spectatorship to witnessing, an act in which the witness has a responsibility to see, listen, remember and to report what they experienced. Taylor’s concept of “witness” is aligned with Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s “listener” in Testimony:

‘The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge de novo […] the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event: through his [sic] very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself […] The listener, therefore, has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself (57-58)’ (Felman and Laub cited in Disappearing Acts 27).

As Taylor further describes the role of the witness, he or she is neither situated as the “perpetrator nor the victim of events, the witness is a part of the conflict and has a responsibility in reporting and remembering of events” (25) Therefore, using Taylor’s notion of critical witnessing, in which the spectator observes, records and reports violence that has made to seem invisible, I ask how can objects of visual culture attempt
to make visible that which has been rendered invisible, and address that which has been
made visible in other media in order to further produce ever greater states of fear,
vulnerability and tractability among migrants.

As I argue in my previous chapters, I find that the visual spectacle of border
security, detention and removal produced in *Border Wars* invites the spectator to view the
embodied performance of neoliberalism and nativism by the security agents, who
maintain and reproduce it through force, while simultaneously encouraging percepticide,
making the physical and systemic violence suffered by migrants seemingly invisible
therefore and resistant to critique, ultimately inviting the spectator to “collude with the
violence around them” (123). Furthermore, given the parallels between those disappeared
in Argentina’s Dirty War and those disappeared, excluded from protections, and removed
from the public sphere both in the visual spectacle and real migration and immigration
detention and removal processes, following Taylor, I conclude that the U.S. and Mexican
States\(^{78}\) attempt to construct and consolidate their conceptualizations of the nation
through the removal, detention and destruction of migrants. Therefore, given these
horrific similarities, wherein visual culture can serve as a participant in this systemic and
symbolic violence, how too can visual culture, through critical witnessing, visualize this
violence and open it up for critique? In particular, how can three documentaries employ
particular visual strategies to serve as sites of critical witnessing?

\(^{78}\) As seen particularly in *De nadie*. 
The Problem with Documentary “Truth”

David Bordwell and Kristin Thomsen describe one of the basic generic functions of documentary, portrayals of truth: “Regardless of the details of its production, the documentary film asks us to assume that it presents trustworthy information about its subject.” (339). However, despite and/or precisely because the assumption of the genre is that it presents factual information, from a visual culture perspective, following Gillian Rose, we must take images seriously and therefore examine how are the images organized and what version of the truth do they construct. I argue we must critically engage with myriad objects of visual culture—the documentary genre’s claim to “veracity” requires us to be vigilant of both what the images invite us to see as well as how we tend to receive them. Similarly, it should be asked, how then do distinct viewing positions produce particular understandings of the visual objects?

And what are we to do with the fact that there are numerous documentaries that lay claim to put a face to U.S. immigration and/or migratory experiences? As Mirzoeff signals, the project of seeking out resistant images “has been thoroughly anticipated by the new deployment of the image as weapon” (14) and furthermore, Mirzoeff argues that we are also so inundated by what he refers to as the “banality of images”, that contestatory visual discourses run the risk of being relegated to the realm of visual culture that we “pass by”, and/or allow to pass by us—knowing there is something to see, but imagining it as that which is “… set aside is beyond our ability to change or remedy” (14). Taylor, as well, in her reflections about studying suffering and the ob-scene (off-

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stage), struggles with her desire to make the horrific visible for critical engagement while avoiding what violent spectacles threaten to do: “destroy the position of witness […] turning the looking […] into that of the voyeur or morbid onlooker” (Disappearing Acts 25). Perhaps there is no clear path out of this trap, but I nonetheless argue that there are visual moments that can serve to disrupt the predominant immigration, border and detention and removal spectacle. They may, however, be hidden in plain sight.

**Documentary Disruptions**

*De nadie* (2005) by Tin Dirdamal, *AbUSed: The Postville Raid* (2010) by Luis Argueta and PBS’s Frontline “Lost in Detention”80 (2011) all capture imaginations that visualize that which Ong describes as the “neoliberal exception,” that “priest open the seam between sovereignty and citizenship, generating successive degrees of insecurity for low-skilled citizens and migrants who will have to look beyond the state for the safeguarding of their rights” (19). Dirdamal’s *De nadie* centers on the abject and violent conditions faced by Central Americans when migrating north through Mexico. *AbUSed: the Postville Raid* explores the effects and the structural roots of the May 12, 2008 raid, at Agriprocessors Inc. in Postville, Iowa. “Lost in Detention” on PBS’s *Frontline* series is a documentary television report that is the result of a year-long investigation by *Frontline* and the American University Investigative Reporting Workshop. “Lost in Detention” examines the current U.S. immigration enforcement system and stories of hidden abuse in detention centers. In their attempts to make visible the lives and experiences of migrants, (that which is otherwise obscured by the dominant border spectacle), we must ask, how

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80 I use quotations for “Lost in Detention” because the program is part of the larger *Frontline* series.
can these visual narratives constitute sites of critical witnessing? I find that one of the most salient themes across these three documentaries is the emergence of the U.S. and Mexican State’s as significant sources of terror effectively working to invert the victim vs. perpetrator criminal dyad.

**De nadie**

*De nadie* visualizes a number of processes and experiences that are rarely referenced in U.S. and Mexican mainstream media and political discourses of migration, namely the violence and danger experienced by Central Americans when migrating through Mexico towards the U.S. In so doing, this film attempts to expand understandings of the U.S.-Mexico migratory process by inviting spectators to view migration from Central American migrants’ points of view. The film, I find, exposes how the migratory journey through Mexico is similarly perilous for Central Americans as the U.S.-Mexico border and borderlands (unauthorized) crossings are for many migrants. In particular, the film focuses on the use of the railroads and migrant shelters, which as the film lays bare, are the spaces and routes used by the poorest of migrants who lack the resources to travel relatively more safely in buses. The film is largely composed of shots from a hand-held camera, in which Dirdamal interviews migrants, Mexican state officials, Railroad employees, sympathetic community members in shelters and others that provide aid to travelling migrants. Among the interviews are testimonials from migrants who have been injured falling from the trains and have lost limbs, one woman who was sexually assaulted, and even one young man who witnessed his parents’ murders along the journey.
In order to visualize its critique, Dirdamal collects interviews of migrants, in a combination of one-time interviews with some migrants, many of whom tell their stories of being robbed and/or extorted by police or gang members. Dirdamal weaves together the stories of migrants as they unfold over a period of days or weeks, throughout the film. In particular, he includes multiple interviews with Honduran migrants María and Santos, and a handful of other migrants, and combines Maria and Santos’ particular tales of violence and sexual assault by gang members and the Mexican police with shorter interviews or clips from multiple immigrants, who ultimately corroborate with their nightmarish testimonies.

The portrait of the Mexican state that emerges is captured in a scene title “Policia: Ladrones con permiso”, (a title that Dirdamal takes from one of the interviews with Santos). Through the use of compilation scenes composed of a series of short takes by ten different interviewees Dirdamal emphasizes the repeated and systemic nature of violence either perpetrated directly by the Mexican State, or indirectly through their tacit permission of the abuses by Marasalvatrucha gang members. Dirdamal also draws attention to the contradiction between formal State discourse and practice, wherein while the Mexican government makes requests of the U.S. for improved treatment of their nationals in the U.S., Mexico is simultaneously committing and/or permitting similar and perhaps even more heinous abuses against the migrants that transit through the Mexican territory. This message is most directly signalled through the inclusion of an interview with an official from the Mexican National Institute of Immigration from their “Centro de Estudios” who explicitly states and recognizes this contradiction.
Dirdamal uses visuals to either support or highlight the contradictions in different interviewee’s statements. For example, while one Veracruz State employee attests to the “safe and sanitary” conditions of migrant detention centers, the filmed footage presents contrasting images showing a detention center that is a dark dirty room that does not match the description offered by the Veracruz official.

A number of scenes highlight the claims and complaints of migrants about their suffered violations. There are also scenes with state officials, who both deny and do not deny these claims, but similarly note that said claims cannot be addressed unless the victims file formal complaints. The documentary also captures various scenes in which migrants and Mexican residents alike comment that filing claims tends to result in the deportation of the reporting migrant and therefore discourages him or her from reporting violations. These scenes portray the Mexican state, via its juridical and securitized branches as failing to provide what Schmidt-Camacho describes as the “substance of citizenship” and instead creating and/or permitting violence to be perpetrated against migrants. In these spaces, as the interviews suggest, the best “legal option” as it is portrayed is to not make claims against the state and simultaneously hope to survive it. However as the multiple interviews with migrants and locals reveal, filing complaints leads to deportation, therefore while ultimately relegated to the ultimate sphere of exception, migrants are induced to remain there, as it is the only space real and juridical that offers them the possibility of passage to the U.S.

In this way the film makes visible the fragmentary positioning of Central American migrants and their simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. While one Mexican
woman interviewed describes how she knows these horrible things happen to migrants, but that they need to report the crimes in order to foster a state response, her testimony signals a desire for the migrants to act as a community—to report crimes, if not for their own justice, but for the justice of others. However, since reporting leads to deportation, and at least, per the perspectives shown in the film does not lead to some form of retribution or justice, the state effectively discourages both individual and community resistance. Through these scenes, we become cognizant of how Central Americans’ non-Mexican citizenship relegates them to another form of belonging, or the assignment an identity that does more harm than good, making them excludable from protections.

While the film is composed of footage from the handheld camera, with what appears to be little to no alterations of light or sound, lending to its construction of a realistic portrayal and emphasizing each scenes’ claim to veracity, the film is also artistically modified through the use of the graphics of a moving train track, data graphics and the use of an original soundtrack, clearly designed to add signifying depth to the visuals it accompanies. In particular, Dirdamal makes use of original music by Alfonso Ruibal, and the song “Los nadie” or the “nobodies/or no ones”, which is a near word-for-word musical rendition of Eduardo Galeano’s poem, “Los nadies”. In addition, the film’s opening sequence features the first quartet of the same poem, formalizing the thematic link between Galeano’s work and the film.

As opposed to inviting spectators to “see like a state”, from the perspective of the Mexican state in this case, De nadie invites spectators to take up the gaze of “los nadies” and/or “los jodidos” as the song would describe them, turning a critical gaze towards the
Mexican state, and the larger systemic violence of poverty. This is captured in scenes that match images of travelling migrants with the song as well as scenes such those that film Maria’s slum in Honduras and the tearful family she left behind, or the testimonies of migrants and locals attesting to how Mexican hospitals and clinics turn away Central American patients. Maria’s testimonials about her sexual assault are particularly painful as she describes, on different occasions, the brutality of her attack as well as her resultant state of shame, which she expresses by telling Dirdamal that she does not plan to return to her family, too ashamed to face them after what has happened to her. Along these lines, Dirdamal relies on a basic convention of documentary genre, intertwining emotion and information as “two elements of truth” (Alicia Kemmit 27). Similarly, as William Scott writes of these documentary conventions: “One knows another’s life because one feels it, one is informed—one sees—through one’s feelings” (9). Kemmit argues that subjective, or “personal”, documentaries are perceived as closer expressions of “truth” through the use of testimonials. While it is beyond the scope of this present analysis, a future and/or more in-depth study of the use of testimonials in documentary would explore the problematics of witnessing as related to testimony and trauma. For example, Wendy Hesford in “Documenting Violations: Rhetorical Witnessing and the Spectacle of Distant Suffering” examines how documentaries can “create a consubstantial space for the rhetorical and political engagement of human rights testimonies through rhetorical strategies of identification and disidentification” (106).

De nadie amasses a collection of those whose relation to the States (both sending and Mexican) align with what I cite in my third chapter as Schmidt-Camacho’s
description of a neoliberal “membership” that as opposed to producing new alliances and
greater protections and flexibilities, instead further exposes workers (and migrants) to
“new forms of social violence and repression at the hands of both state and non-state
actors (Sassen 2003, 42).” (“Ciudadana X” 260). Through the compilation of migrant
stories, as well as the numerous non-migrant interviews, the film assembles a collection
of stories of subjective violence and attempts to index the connection between subjective
and systemic violence. Ultimately, the viewer has to make the connections between the
stories and their relations to poverty and (in)security. I find that the film figures as a site
of critical witnessing insofar as it asks both victims and witnesses of suffering, violence
and injustice to remember and report what they experienced. The music selected by
Dirdamal not only serves to direct spectator’s interpretation of the interviewees, but also
reminds us of the power of the filmmaker to shape this visual and auditory narrative. His
position is further distinguished from those of the interviewees where he clearly
possesses the privilege of flexibility that far surpasses the subjects of the film as he
travels to Honduras in order to trace some of the roots of Maria’s migratory experience.

In terms of filming Mexico, the country does not emerge as a monolithic space of
terror, in spite of the graphic that Dirdamal includes that “51% of crimes against migrants
are committed by public officials”. The film also offers scenes that capture the spaces and
moments of hope. While many of the scenes filmed in the migrant shelters capture the
testimonies of migrants and are minimally altered, in the segment/chapter “La Patrona:
Manifestación de esperanza” Dirdamal highlights the efforts of one community, and one
woman in particular, who have organized so as to provide aid to migrants. Dirdamal
uplifts the scene with bright high-lit day shots, festive jorocho music and shots of the
town decorated for the Christmas celebration. In these scenes, we are able to see how
“survival movements” to use Jean Franco’s term or grass-roots humanitarians have
emerged in response to what the film projects as the needs of migrants.

When considered as a site of counter-visuality against, or in the context of, the
spectacle of detention and removal produced on the U.S. security TV programs, and the
frontier scenario in explorer magazines, a film such as De nadie interrupts their
predominant images, wherein it expands and contextualizes the migratory experience for
those attempting to immigrate to the U.S. via Mexico. Similarly, as we will see in films
such as “Lost in Detention” or AbUSed: The Postville Raid, De nadie makes evident that
the dangers and challenges faced by migrants extend far beyond the crossing of the U.S.-
Mexico border. Obviously the viewing position of the spectator can also bring about
various understandings of the film. On one level, given Dirdamal’s Mexican nationality,
the film constructs a critical gaze towards the Mexican State’s use and permission of
violence against migrants. Viewed from the perspective of the predominant U.S.
representation of immigration as a U.S.-Mexico border issue, the film explodes the U.S.-
Mexico border as the catch-all source for immigration violence. De nadie’s intervention
on the systemic level is implicit or explicit depending on the viewing position of the
spectator. For the viewer that recognizes the use of Eduardo Galeano, the linkages to the
historical and systemic roots of being “jodido” in the Latin American context are perhaps
more evident. Perhaps Dirdamal’s use of Galeano, or my use of it in a U.S. university
classroom, is similar to the moment when Hugo Chávez gave Barack Obama Galeano’s
The Open Veins of America. To more fully understand the systemic nature of the violence in which migration is rooted, one must take up further study. One viewing of one film will not be sufficient, but can serve as an invitation for study and intervention.

**AbUSed: The Postville Raid**

AbUSed: The Postville Raid by Luis Argueta explores the effects and the structural and systemic roots of the May 12, 2008 workplace raid, in Postville, Iowa. The film was produced over a two year period starting immediately after the raid, at Agriprocessors Inc., what was at the time the largest kosher meat packing plant in the nation. The film “explores the devastating effects of U.S. immigration enforcement policies” on the children of detainees and deportees, their families and the Postville community. In addition to Argueta’s numerous trips to Iowa, he also travelled to many other locations such as Washington DC, Guatemala, and Mexico and surrounding Iowa towns and cities to collect testimonies and footage. Through the numerous testimonies of detainees, their children, clergy, federal employees, community members, politicians and even Nobel Peace Laureate, Rigoberta Menchú, the film provides multiple points of enunciation and serves as site for contestation via visualization of programs such as “Operation Endgame” –the securitized arm of the North American neoliberal project in the U.S. context, whose goal is to “remove all removable immigrants” from the U.S.

Through the use of stock footage, numerous testimonies and graphics, the film visualizes the raid by Immigration and Customs Enforcement that involved approximately nine-hundred federal agents, and led to the arrest of three-hundred and eighty-nine immigrant workers, the majority from Guatemala and Mexico, constituting
“the largest workplace raid in U.S. history”. However, as the fall-out captured in the film makes evident, not only was the raid unprecedented in scale, but the manner in which the workers were jailed and submitted to expedited “fast track” federal criminal sentencing, not civil immigration court, also led to nearly three-hundred workers being convicted of aggravated identity theft, was also unheard of for many federal attorneys, justices and interpreters assigned to the cases. Among the juridical exceptions practiced with Postville detainees that the film highlights were the exploding plea bargains offered to detainees, in which they could either accept a lower sentence, five months in jail followed by deportation for the crime of aggravated identity theft, or stand trial, which implied undefined jail time and the possibility of up to five years in jail and a fine of $250,000. The film captures these circumstances and facts through interviews with detainees and immigration and federal attorneys, and numeric graphics.

As both the film and the event itself make evident, the Postville raid restaged the spectacle of detention and removal into the heartland of the nation and relied on its visibility, and invisibility, to produce ever-greater states of fear and heighten the sense of deportability among migrants. As a visual event or performance, witnessed by the people present, and then viewed through press coverage, the presence of the State as embodied in the uniformed and armed agent is one of the elements that makes the detention spectacle an intelligible scenario. As Taylor describes scenarios, they are powerful tools whose “portable framework bears the weight of accumulative repeats” (Archive and Repertoire 28). The other recognizable element is the migrant. Viewed as a performed scenario, the visual performance of detention works to criminalize, and render visible the
deportability of the migrant through the production of the handcuffed and chained detainable (and subsequently removable) body. This visual image also serves to deny the presumption of innocence because the forced performance of criminality restages scenario of detention, criminalizing the migrant via the juridical and physical visual association.

Whether witnessed or in person or viewed as mediatized spectacle, the Postville raid served to constitute what De Genova calls the Homeland Security State, wherein “Producing culprits [in and of itself] produces insecurity” while simultaneously amplifying the lived condition of deportability. Following De Genova (“Culprits”) the Postville raid, sought to exploit the condition of deportability, particularly by developing the more insidious and legally exceptional categories of detainability and removability, while also effectively criminalizing migrants. Following De Genova, I argue that the Postville raid, also sought to cull non-citizen laborers, particularly indigenous Guatemalan laborers, from terrorists, under the guise of The Homeland Security State apparatus. Whereas De Genova argues that the Homeland Security State serves to separate Hispanic workers from terrorists, in the case of Postville, the U.S. State carried out its exceptional experiment on what it perhaps perceived to be a more tractable population given that the majority of detainees were illiterate Guatemalans of indigenous descent.  

On this last point, my use of the word “cull” is both figurative and literal, as one of the most insidious practices experienced by detainees and witnesses, that have now

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81 See Camayd-Freixas and Karla Mari McKanders.
become a number of critical witnesses featured in Arugeta’s film, is how detainees were literally herded, in groups of ten, like cows, in chains, into the Waterloo, Iowa Cattle Congress expo buildings, which were converted into makeshift detention centers and fast-track federal court house, and in front of Federal Judges to be tried, in groups—a process that would ultimately subject detainees to their removal from the public sphere and country.

Notably, it is through the diverse moments of critical witnessing that emerged in the aftermath of the raid that brought these practices to light, beyond the populations directly affected. AbUSed re-visualizes these otherwise off-screen practices through the use of stock footage, original footage of the Cattle Congress, and the testimonies of detainees, community members, as well as a number of interviews by Federal employees that were involved in the cases and descriptions offered by David Wolfe-Leopold (President of the American Immigration Lawyers Association). Through this compendium of reports and reactions the film attempts to render visible the aftermath of Postville raid and thereby open it up to critique. The film also works to make visible the structural roots of the Postville immigration history, a point I will return to.

This practice first came to light through the essay written by Federal Court Interpreter Eric Camayd-Freixas, who broke the sanctioned code of silence and made his witnessing available to the public, initially in his essay that was summarized and linked in the New York Times, rendering visible that which the Postville Raid attempted to disappear. Argueta then captures and reproduces Camayd-Freixas’ essay in an interview with him, in which Camayd-Freixas re-states much of what he had exposed in his essay.
In addition to the numerous testimonies, interviews and stock footage, *AbUSed* also includes scenes of the theatrical play *La historia de nuestras vidas* that was produced and performed by seven of the detainees—who remained in the U.S. as material witnesses in subsequent trials of the Agriprocessors management. In this way, the documentary captures how the raid’s opponents fought back, using visibility as one of their weapons of choice. Notably, in the drama captured in the film, the detainee/actors perform the act of being chained together at the waist and their group trials. Through their dramatic re-interpretation of the experience, detainees re-positioned that which was relegated to the ob-scene or off-stage to center stage for contemplation, witnessing and critique.

The film weaves together the diverse elements of the raid, the town’s historical context and aftermath through the use of many interviews that address similar topics and experiences. The film exposes the juridical exceptionalism practiced in the trials, through the testimonies of federal attorneys, judges, immigration lawyers and detainees. As opposed to inviting spectators to “see like a state”, as programs like *Border Wars* often do, *AbUSed* invites spectators to critically assess the actions of the state. For example, using cross-cuts Argueta contrasts the detainee testimonies in which they report being hit and terrorized by ICE agents, with the official testimony of ICE’s director of the Office of investigations Marcy Forman, who claims they were treated “with the utmost respect”. Argueta also includes testimony of Pedro, a young boy whose mother was detained, who describes his mother’s experience: “y ella tuvo miedo que nos iban a agarrar y por eso dijo que no tenia a nadie, and they know now that we are minors, pero no la sacan”.
Through scenes such as these, and the emotional interviews with children of detainees and their teachers, the official discourse of the State is ruptured wherein Argueta creates visual mismatches between the State’s claims and the images, effectively turning anchorage and relay against the official testimonies of the state. As Forman explains to the Congressional subcommittee on Immigration how “ICE’s worksite enforcement operations” are part of the ICE program: “ICE is first and foremost a federal law enforcement agency with the mandate of protecting national security, public safety by enforcing the nation’s immigration and customs laws”.

As the documentary makes visibly evident, it is precisely along these lines that the Postville raid failed to produce the necessary images to support a project of protecting national security and public safety. In other words, this particular spectacle, or scenario, did not work as expected because it failed to restage all expected elements. In fact, it is precisely the detention of workers, apprehended in the workplace, (or arrested via traffic violation as in the case of “Lost in Detention”) that seems to provoke protest, precisely because these scenarios fail to portray detainees as threats to national and public security. The scenes of emotional testimonies by parents and children also disrupt the terms as used by Forman. Camayd-Freixas also relates this perspective when he writes: “No doubt, ICE fulfills an extremely important and noble duty. The question is why tarnish its stellar reputation by targeting harmless illegal workers. The answer is economics and politics” (11). His comments are seconded in the July 20th, 2008 editorial to the New York Times, as author argues “Deporting unauthorized workers is one thing; sending
desperate breadwinners to prison, and their families deeper into poverty, is another”
(“Shame of Postville, Iowa”).

This author seems to suggest then that as long as migrants are deported on civil immigration charges and not imprisoned for aggravated identity theft (a practice since rendered unconstitutional), that the former is acceptable. What seems to be missing or disappeared from these assumptions is how being an “unauthorized worker” usually already implies a high-degree of social, political and economic marginality. *AbUSed: The Postville Raid*, not only covers the aftermath of the raid, but also traces the structural history and details of the systemic violence that created the conditions for the raid’s subjective violence. The film (and the raid in general) serves to reveal how the neoliberal and neo-imperial states of exception intersect with immigration. As the former Agriprocessors workers and detainees testimonies make evident, prior to the raid, migrants and their children were already living within what Ong describes as the striated zones of neoliberal exception: “The logic of exception in global capitalism allows the combination of managerial and labor regimes in transnational networks that carve striated spaces—or ‘latitudes’—shaped by the coordination of systems of governmentality and regimes of labor incarceration” (*Neoliberalism as Exception* 21). Along these lines the raid was not a surprising or out of place act but rather an event of objective violence that is part and parcel of the systemic violence in which it is rooted.

In particular, the raid, as seen through these moments of critical witnessing and/or protest, brought to the surface the exceptional status in which U.S. born children of undocumented parents exist—effectively lacking parental rights, that is the right to be
parented by their parents. In travelling to Southern Mexico and Guatemala to the sites where some detainees were deported, with their U.S. born children, the film also visibly expands the image of “removable” persons. Furthermore, the documentary makes visible the protracted detention and removal process, in which many workers were detained or monitored with ankle bracelets, serving five months for identity fraud before being subsequently deported. These are the elements of the detention and removal process and security spectacle that never make the cut on *Border Wars*.

Furthermore, in the immediate aftermath of the raid, in which hundreds took shelter at St. Bridget’s cathedral, the community organized itself with the assistance of pro-bono immigration attorneys, in order to account for the hundreds disappeared and initiate the process of filling out G-28 forms on their behalf, so that the lawyers could present themselves as legal counsel for the detainees. The film shares how the Postville victims experienced a removal from the public and laboring sphere akin to a disappearance as Pastor David Vasquez describes it.

What is particularly disturbing and chilling are the comparisons that emerge in which some detainees related their experience in the raid with previous experiences of violence in Guatemala. As Pastor David Vasquez (Luther College) shares in one of the filmed interviews, for some of the older workers, the sounds of the helicopters reminded them of the war in Guatemala. Although, the film does not describe at any length the violence that occurred in Guatemala, it does cite the conflicts through stock footage and voice over. Nowhere in the film, however, is the relationship between the U.S. and that
violence directly mentioned or signaled. As a spectator, I make this connection, but it is not formally stated nor explicitly visualized in the film.  

As a visual document, AbUSed, also makes visible what Sister Mary McCauley, who emerged as an advocate, spokesperson and community organizer in the aftermath of the raid, describes as “quadruple victimization”: as poor Central Americans and Mexicans, many victims of war and the violence of poverty; as migrants and the horrors they faced in their migratory journeys; as underpaid laborers that worked in abject conditions; and most recently as victims of a juridical experiment that has all but been subsequently rendered unconstitutional. By tracing and visualizing each of these four forms of victimization, the film seeks to trace and highlight the relationships between systemic and subjective violence, in Zizek’s terms. The film ties the drive to migrate to its structural roots by mixing stock footage from the 1980s war in Guatemala with interviews, such as that of Rigoberta Menchú who came to Postville after the raid. It also captures the public hearings in which former Agriprocessors workers describe the horrendous working conditions, many of whom were released with GPS ankle-braces after the raid because they were children or parents. The film also connects the development of Agriprocessors Inc. in Iowa with the larger history of de-unionization, mechanization and importation of immigrant labor by matching stock footage of union meat packing plants in Chicago from the 1960s or 1970s with descriptions by University of Iowa Professor Stephen Bloom who describes these processes.

What emerges in *AbUSed* is the image of the U.S. State as the perpetrator of terror and trauma while performing its duty to maintain the neoliberal *dispositif*. As Linda Williams writes of documentary film, “some form of truth is the always receding goal of documentary film. But the truth figured by documentary cannot be a simple unmasking or reflection. It is a careful construction, an intervention in the politics and semiotics of representation (72)” (Cited in Kemmitt 25). Argueta’s film effectively intervenes in the politics and semiotics of representation by making visible, via the filming of critical witnessing, how the U.S. state deployed terror through its discourse of protecting and serving the public. The language and matching images that are repeated throughout the film are that of decimation; devastation; terror and heartbreak. For example, in one scene a local resident, Nancy, is interviewed at the restaurant where she works. The scene and her words underscore the visual language that the film puts forth. She tearfully describes and questions the results of the raid: “devastation and fear. That’s what you could call Postville. […] What’s going to happen to the children?” The film also captures through emotional testimonies and shots of shuttered businesses and abandoned homes how the raid was devastating in both scale and affect in Postville, a town that had a population of only two-thousand at the time.

While the film portrays the devastating effects of the raid on the local population, extra-filmically, on a national level, as a real mediatized event, numerically the Postville raid had very little impact on the nearly millions of undocumented in the country at the time, in terms of achieving the goal of “removing all removable aliens” (“Endgame”). Therefore, it is its performativity and visualization, as well as through its different levels
of disappearance, that the Postville raid could constitute both a successful and failed juridical human experiment, functioning as an affective bomb, designed to send shock waves throughout the undocumented population in the U.S.\(^{83}\) that would be most cognizant of its effects, while serving as a demonstration of the forceful hand of the Homeland Security state.

**“Lost in Detention”**

*Frontline’s* “Lost in Detention” takes up a project that is similar to Argueta’s film, in that it examines the current U.S. immigration enforcement system and stories of hidden abuse in detention centers. “Lost in Detention” is a documentary television report that is the result of a year-long investigation by *Frontline* reporters and the American University Investigative Reporting Workshop. Through the reporting of Maria Hinojosa the special examines how Secure Communities has worked to detain and deport hundreds of thousands of non-criminal immigrants, and highlights the contradiction between official government claims for the use and the success of the program in deporting violent and repeating criminals, and the reality of what *Frontline* portrays as the detention, removal and deportation of non-criminal immigrants such as mothers who are swept up after routine traffic stops or for other minor offenses. “Lost in Detention” makes visible some of the elements, and/or renders imaginable, experiences of the non-expedited removal, i.e. the non-catch and release detention process of immigration enforcement, from which the mediatized border spectacle distracts.

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\(^{83}\) Alex Rivera’s recent direction of the music video “Hielo” also includes a scene in which undocumented individuals watch the reporting of an ICE raid on the TV news.
In its attempt at balanced journalism “Lost in Detention” combines the testimonies from U.S. government officials such as White House director of intergovernmental affairs, Cecilia Muñoz and Deputy Director of ICE Kumar Kibble. Given Frontline’s access to high-level government officials as well as its (limited) access to detention centers, and deportation flights it has a variety of footage with which to build its visual report. Given the relationship the U.S. Customs and Border Protection seems intent on forming with the media, as discussed in greater length in my second chapter, it is not surprising to find that the ride-along that ICE permits for the Frontline cameras is one in which the agents arrest a criminal immigrant as opposed to a non-criminal immigrant. In this opening scene, the cameras essentially provide spectators with a sequence of images that is quite similar to those shown on Border Wars. While Hinojosa’s interviews are ultimately critical of Muñoz and Kibble, the documentary also offers the U.S. State, via these officials’ testimonies and the footage they provide, numerous opportunities to put forth their arguments and performances.

On one level, the special provides visual space for the already common use of what Jonathan Inda calls practices of enumeration and the use of technologies of enumeration, such as statistics, averages and probabilities, as well as charts and graphs to construct the social and visual description of the “illegal immigrant”. Inda argues that technologies of enumeration “are uniquely authoritative ways of knowing and producing truths about the social body. They slice up the population in “a myriad of ways, sorting and dividing people, things, or behaviors into groups, leaving in their wake a host of categories and classifications” (Urla 1993: 820)” (25 Targeting Immigrants). As Kumar
Kibble tells Maria Hinojosa in their one-on-one interview, captured through medium and close reverse shots:

We have record-breaking numbers in terms of criminal alien removals:

One hundred ninety-five thousand last year, about half of the people we removed. That included one thousand murderers, six thousand sex offenders, forty-five thousand serious drug violators. As we expand the deployment of Secure Communities, focus on criminal aliens, you’ll see that number continue to go up and up.

*Frontline* however does not produce an accompanying graphic to match Kibbles numbers, in which he highlights that ‘nearly half of deportees were criminals’. Here too Kibble’s particular use of enumeration serves to celebrate, as opposed to question or highlight, that the other approximate two hundred thousand deportees did not have criminal records. As Inda argues, the use of enumeration, serves to make immigrants visible, “render[ing] things into calculable and programmable forms” (7). In this way, while matching Kibble’s comments with some of the footage that ICE provided, “Lost in Detention” does not assist Kibble in his process of enumeration, as it does not also include a complimentary graphic, and explicitly focuses on “the other half of the equation”.

Instead, through the use of detailed interviews of detainees, deportees and spouses and U.S. born children of deportees, as well as former detainees and detention center employees, the documentary presents a critical and human view of the government data – notably by exposing the lived painful realities and putting faces to what the U.S.
government has called necessary collateral damage of Secure Communities and U.S. Immigration enforcement policies, as well as demonstrating to the viewing public the juridical exceptionalism on which the immigration detention system relies. These moments of critical witnessing, in which these individuals report on the violence they have suffered and/or witnessed are also complimented by the “Lost in Detention” webpage. In this manner, *Frontline* takes advantage of the visuality of enumeration through a map that demonstrates through growing circles the increases in immigrant detention populations throughout the U.S. since 1981.84

“Lost in Detention” highlights through detainee and former employee testimonials, the systematic human rights abuses that are committed in the detention and removal process, particularly in the juridical exception of detention of immigrants awaiting deportation hearings or deportation. Through her interviews with a former mental health advocate at the Wilacy private detention facility in Texas, as well as the year-long investigation, María Hinojosa brings fourth the realities of immigrant detention: sexual assault and harassment, holding in facilities far away from points of initial arrest; the lack of a right to legal counsel.85 The program also includes an explanation by Mark Fleming, an attorney for the National Immigrant Justice Center, of the basics of immigrant detention. So while the detention and removal process is public policy and theoretically public knowledge, the fact that *Frontline* dedicates a special to

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85 In this way “Lost in Detention” visualizes much of what Nina Rabin reports.
the detention and removal regime signals how immigration detention and removal is a practice that is often hidden in plain sight, and/or deployed as a visual weapon.86

“Lost in Detention” also attempts to “see the state”, by redirecting the gaze at the State, taking up the images provided by the State and positioning them for critical viewing. For instance, in an interview with Gary Segura, (Political Science: Stanford University), Segura describes the current political climate in Washington and its relationship to immigration enforcement. As Segura speaks, the visuals switch from shots of him to shots from the tarmac on which a deportation flight is prepared. The sequence includes medium shots of ICE agents chaining or unchaining deportees at the wrists and waists, as well a take of multiple handcuffs and chains that have been laid out on the cement, perhaps post-use—as if to connect each deportee that boards the plane with each emptied shackle. The Segura interview is also mixed with that with University of Southern California Professor Roberto Suro, Professor of Public Policy. As Segura states:

The administration has believed since it was sworn in that in order to make the political ground fertile for a comprehensive immigration reform bill that enforcement had to come first. But there’s no chance of comprehensive immigration reform in the current political environment.

To this Segura’s comments are added, so as to demonstrate additional support with a similar statement: “Washington has been unable to enact new immigration legislation for,

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like, 20 years. It’s in this vacuum that enforcement all of a sudden has become this kind of talisman that you have to prove the government is in control”. Therefore, according to the program’s visualizations, while politicians debate or fail to debate immigration policy, hundreds of thousands are being removed.

“Lost in Detention” also presents a particular counter-visuality of the militarized immigration enforcement program by casting a critical gaze on what it indexes as a hyper-masculine militarized system. Following the aforementioned Segura statement, is a medium shot of a male ICE agent holding a semi-automatic weapon. As he guards the perimeter of the previously referenced deportation flight, an airplane in the distance takes off. This shot is coupled with the following Segura voice-over: “In the absence of reform, we’re left with, essentially, enforcement on steroids” (my emphasis). However, given the construction of the shot and its interview-voiceover, here the masculine hero is not invited to tell his story but rather the spectator is invited to view the armed agent as the hyper-masculine embodiment of the U.S. immigration enforcement regime, adopting a gaze akin to that of the detainee. Using the visual and narrating tools at hand, “Lost in Detention” re-signifies the familiar militarized image, such as that shown repeatedly in Border Wars, and in so doing, presents a moment of counter-visuality, usurping the right to look oppositionally at the State.

“Lost in Detention” also contrasts moments of emotional affect with juridical and State discourse by putting interviews with Cecilia Muñoz in dialog with interviews with the spouses and children left behind after a family member’s deportation. Through this format, the documentary reveals the misalignment of the language of the law and its lived
reality. As Hinojosa asks Muñoz: “Aren’t you simply fulfilling the Republican agenda [by detaining and deporting non-criminal migrants]?” A question to which Muñoz responds, “What the President is doing is enforcing the law of the land.” Given these differences in opinion, “Lost in Detention” works to visualize and these divergent narratives, and to capture what these enforcement practices looks like and entail by narrating it from a variety of perspectives and by bringing to the screen practices and images that are effectively disappeared and/or deployed by the U.S. State.

For example, some key segments of the documentary trace reports of abuse in detention centers. Through the revelations of the results of the investigative reporting as well as the on-camera testimonies of former detention center employees and detainees, “Lost in Detention” invites both a witnessing and contemplation of the harsh detention and deportation enforcement system. The program, much like that of AbUSed reveals how for many the detention and removal process is a horrific juridical and social experiment.

However, one of the forms of evidence “Lost in Detention” seems to put forth to stop the detention and deportation of non-criminal immigrants is a reliance on an image of the immigrant as law-abiding parent and heterosexual spouse. In this way, “Lost in Detention” redeploy a discourse that imagines the disciplined heteronormative subject as deserving of the management of its life, to use Foucauldian terms of biopolitics. This discourse of good deserving family immigrants however, can relegate through its trace the non-married and/or non-heteronormative immigrants (deviant and excludable others) to the current enforcement practices of detention and removal. As Angela Kelley, (V.P.,
Center for American Progress) suggests in her interview with Hinojosa ‘the face of immigration is changing’, commenting: “this is not the young Mexican man scaling the fence, these are families and children”.

But as we may recall, the imaginary Mexican male migrant is already visualized as menacing in a variety of mediums (Border Wars and Backpacker for example). However, if we are to follow this line of reason, signaled by Kelley, and through the family interviews, the discourse that emerges it one that does not challenge or disrupt the image of the detainable and deportable male migrant. So, while holding Kibble and Muñoz’s proverbial feet to the fire, “Lost in Detention” through the accumulation of interviews with non-criminal family-detainees, tends to recreate a discourse that argues that it is unacceptable, or less acceptable, to round up mothers, separate families, deport U.S. born children, than it is to return to a bracero-scenario. But as Lake County, IL Sherriff Mark Curran tells Hinojosa:

> When you take a father out of the house and you deport him or a mother out of the house and you deport her and you leave those children now without one of the two spouses, to me that’s not a good recipe for the future of America. And it makes us a lesser country.

By emphasizing positions such as Sherriff Curran’s, as well as Hinojosa’s own commentary, Frontline films predominantly from the “native’s point of view”. However, in contrast to the positioning of the Border Wars cameras, in “Lost in Detention” viewers are discouraged from adopting the surveillant gaze of the ICE agent and are invited to take up a critical viewing of the State. Where the “native’s point of view” authorizes the
native, based on the qualification of being native, liberal or conservative, to debate and determine the place of the migrant in the national space and imaginary, “Lost in Detention” nevertheless reproduces this perspective.

Conclusion

In closing, given that the spectacle of detention and removal disappears what I view as the more inhumane elements of the neoliberal dispositif, that is disappearing both subjective and systemic violence, I examine how three documentaries address and make visible these violent experiences. While not comparative, among the three documentaries, AbUSed dedicates the greatest filmic time and effort to visually trace the relationships between systemic and subjective violence. In particular, through its tracking of the structural roots of emigration out of Guatemala as well as the changes in the agriculture industry as they relate to neoliberalism. Nevertheless, I find that each documentary presents moments of critical witnessing that render visible, and open up to critique, pieces of the inhumane experiences of violence and poverty as they relate to immigration to the U.S. These three documentaries provide visions of migrant experiences, in their different countries of residence, in migration, in the lived condition of illegality and deportability, as well as in detention, removal and family separation. Through these moments that attempt to report, share and make visible these experiences in subjective and systemic violence, these documentaries work to re-signify both the migrant and the State, and in so doing invert the predominant criminal perpetrator dyad produced in the spectacle of detention and removal, pointing again and again to the States (U.S. and
Mexico) as primary perpetrators of destabilization and terror, either through their activities or their tacit permissions.

Through these imaginations, I find that these documentaries make visible what I see as the neoliberal of NAFTA, or even CAFTA *dispositif*. I am reminded of that Miller-McCune cover with the California DOT road sign of the crossing migrants with the added title “Caution: NAFTA at Work”. I cannot speak to that magazine, or its appropriation of that sign, but when I view these films, and the experiences they attempt to capture, I see the violent functioning of the neoliberal *dispositif* and its attendant projects such as NAFTA and Operation Endgame, or Plan Mérida. I see the spaces and experiences of neoliberal exception.
CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, I have examined the kinds of representational work diverse visual discourses of U.S. and Mexican borders and migration do in the frame of and/or name of neoliberalism. I adopt DeBord’s term of spectacle to study what I see as border spectacles: the visual construction of the social relations, meanings and agendas that are visualized and disappeared in a collection of images of the U.S.-Mexico border. In particular, I draw from Debord’s understanding of spectacles wherein they imply the study of social relations that are mediated by images. Along these lines, I have analyzed how visual techniques and strategies are deployed in various objects of visual culture, and how they teach spectators, i.e. the viewing public(s), to see and think about borders, migration and citizenship.

The first chapter studies how a group of articles in explorer magazines produced in the U.S. portray the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, their natural environment, and immigration. The articles were chosen because of their treatment of the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, and in particular were found linked on a website dedicated to the late Kris Eggle, a park ranger killed in the Monument by a Mexican fugitive in 2002. One of the dominant tropes that emerges in this body of articles is that of the frontier. In effect, the borderlands are portrayed and effectively reconstituted as a frontier in need of rescue and reclamation. My studies of Border Wars in the second chapter also reveal the use of the frontier scenario as part of Border Wars overall construction of the U.S.-Mexico Border. This is not a new discourse, but rather indicates reliance upon a
recognizable scenario, to use Diana Taylor’s term, in that the frontier scenario is redeployed in explorer magazines so as to construct the imaginary of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as one in need of protections by sanctioned explorers. Here too, as I have argued, the frontier discourse and scenario rely upon troubling erasures in order to constitute themselves, not the least of which is their reliance on a discourse founded in genocide.

The second chapter focuses on what I refer to as the spectacle of detention and removal: the visual (mediatized) manifestation of official U.S. immigration policies in their neoliberal context in two “immigration security” television shows, *Border Wars* and *Homeland Security USA*. Drawing from Taylor’s terminology, I conclude that the spectacle of detention and removal encourages percepticide of the socio-political economic structures of U.S. immigration at the Mexican border, as well as effectively disappears many of the elements and procedures of the detention and removal regime that do not result from border apprehensions, but rather occur within the U.S. borders, such as work place detentions, family separations, the deportation of U.S. citizens. I find that these objects of visual culture do not explore the structural roots of immigration nor the historical development and expansion of the U.S. border security regime, other than to cite poverty as a motivator for migration or to signal how increases in security in urban centers and after September 11, 2001, have driven migrants to cross in evermore inhospitable terrains and dangerous conditions. In fact, I conclude that these are actively disappeared throughout these sites of visual culture. The complicated structural (socio-political-historical-economic) roots of poverty and even the U.S. border securitization are
not exposed, nor sought after in the predominant immigration spectacle. In its focus on the U.S. – Mexico border as the site of immigration, and Mexico as the source of “these problems” and its imaginations, this spectacle ultimately works to fulfill neoliberal agendas through the attempted erasures and distractions from the functioning of the neoliberal dispositif.

One of the ways in which we can examine migration and experiences within neoliberalism is to analyze critical imaginations of these experiences, as captured in film. In my third chapter, I examine how Sleep Dealer and Sin dejar huella visualize the unfolding of neoliberalism in Mexico, its roots, its possible futures, as well as possible alternatives. As I signal therein, these objects of visual culture offer critical views of the effects of neoliberalism (as policy and state form) on members of the lowest classes in Mexico and contemplate surviving, surrendering to and rebelling against the neoliberal model (as each film portrays it). Furthermore, both films posit Mexico’s borders, north and south, as key sites for the contemplation of the role of the state, the economy and the individual. I argue that these films can serve as formants of, as well as disruptions to, popular political imaginaries and understandings of lower-class workers, their migrations and their relationships to broader socio-political and economic structures, particularly in their Mexican context.

Furthermore, I conclude that these visual embodiments, through the protagonists, provide opportunities for spectators to contemplate the relationships between these subaltern actors and the socio-political and socio-economic structures. As I draw on Aihwa Ong and Alicia Schmidt-Camacho throughout this dissertation, these films help
make visible the distinct viewing positions and lived experiences of the North American neoliberal project—where for some it is understood as a package of state-sponsored free-market economic policies, for many others it implies experiences of insecurity, required mobility and flexibility and perhaps even the sacrifice of one’s present and/or future.

Where the films examined in the third chapter offer critical views of migratory experiences and the unfolding of the North American neoliberal dispositif in its Mexican context, in my fourth chapter I examine how documentary film and television can serve as sites of critical witnessing of the violence of migration, the lived condition of deportability and detention and removal. Therefore, I posit that documentary film and television centered on violence suffered by migrants, during the migratory process, in the lived condition of deportability, and/or in detention and removal procedures, have the potential to visualize contestatory discourses, serve as loci of denunciations and constitute sites of critical witnessing. I analyze how De nadie, AbUSed: The Postville Raid, and “Lost in Detention” serve as sites for visualizing and reporting on violence that has been experienced by migrants, detainees and deportees. I find that each documentary utilizes a variety of visual strategies that serve to disrupt the imaginations put forth and disappeared in the border spectacle.

In closing, in my examination of visual discourses in the times and territories of NAFTA, I have attempted to follow Renato Rosaldo, who I cited in my introduction, where he writes

[the art of interpreting the literal border today involves the simultaneous analysis of the theater and its symbolic dimensions as well as the actual]
violence. One should not reduce one to the other, not become so
constructivist as not to notice that people are being killed, not look so
closely at the violence as not to notice its symbolic dimensions. (635)

In my examinations of these visual narratives, I find that some deploy and reproduce
spectacles of detention and removal and frontier scenarios, using particular visual
strategies that tend to do the work of a neoliberal agenda. Similarly, this study reveals
and analyzes how visual violence is deployed in these imaginations so as to disappear and
or produce particular images of migrants. Furthermore, my work studies where visual
narratives can serves as sites of counter-visuality, disrupting imaginations of criminalized
migrants and putting into critical relief the advance of neoliberalism as it relates to
borders and migrations.

I refer to this study as “The NAFTA Spectacle” because my studies of these
diverse visual narratives continuously lead me back to NAFTA and the violence and
contradictions of the North American neoliberal dispositif. I also employ the term
spectacle because it indexes the social relations that are mediated and even constituted by
and through images. I could not study the U.S.-Mexico border, its real violence and its
theater, without addressing the predominant economic agreement and agenda that
organizes the economic relationship between the two. While NAFTA makes provisions
for the free flow of goods and capital, it is mute on the topic of labor. And while the
Mexican government’s accommodations for NAFTA, namely the reduction and
elimination of farm subsidies and communal land holdings, in combination with the
U.S.’s refusal to implement commensurate measures, have contributed to the
destabilization of the farm economy in Mexico, encouraging emigration, U.S. border security attempts to remove or deny entry to those who are drawn to it by virtue of the U.S.-Mexico economic relationship. This, I argue, is not an oversight but rather the intentional inclusion, via exclusion, of migrant labor, in the neoliberal project, which produces and relies upon a detainable and deportable workforce. As Nestor García Canclini argues, we must pay attention to that which neoliberalism excludes in order to constitute itself. (La globalización imaginada). Therefore, I have sought to study the visual discourses of the U.S.-Mexico border relationship via NAFTA, and in particular, I have attempted to pay close attention to where we can see, and not see, those included via their exclusion.

Visual culture offers us myriad moments in which to study the imaginations, representations and constitutions of the notions of national belonging and citizenship. As the recent proposals for U.S. immigration reform make evident, discussions about immigration are always already discussions about securing the U.S.-Mexico Border, and hinge on ever increasing militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border. So while the current U.S. immigration reform proposals will be formally and officially decided in the political chambers of the U.S. Congress and Senate, the political climate in which they emerge is informed by visual culture, and the “moments of oppressive optimism” (13), to use Berlant’s term, such as those that emerge in the border spectacles studied herein.
**APPENDIX A: PHOTOGRAPHS FROM ANNETTE MCGIVENNEY’S “WILDEST PARK IN AMERICA”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Title</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Cholla cactus (pink) (medium shot)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Border Patrol agent (blue)(extreme close shot of shoulder)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Saguaro (pink) with white underwear (close shot)</td>
<td>“Victoria’s Dirty Secret”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Cholla cactus (pink) (small photo 1” x 1”) (medium shot)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Park Ranger (pink) (medium shot)</td>
<td>“Cactus Huggers need not Apply”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Border Patrol Agent Glen Payne –(medium shot) uniform is blue/black, cowboy hat is pale pink</td>
<td>“Law and Disorder”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Young man (medium-long shot) jeans, hat and flora are pink</td>
<td>“Migrant or Drug Smuggler?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Military boots (small photo) 1”x1” (medium-long) (pink creosote in back ground)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Black gallon jug, with pink shrub (close shot)</td>
<td>“Jugs and Drugs”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: OUTLINE OF PHOTO GALLERY ACCOMPANYING CHARLES BOWDEN’S “OUR WALL”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Caption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Metal border fence and white cross that reads “no identificado”</td>
<td>Tijuana, Mexico</td>
<td>“A stark cross hangs at the border for an unknown migrant who sought prosperity in the U.S. but died in the crossing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Western end of border barrier, in the ocean</td>
<td>Border Field State Park, California</td>
<td>“A surreal hedge of up ended railway tracks, easily penetrated or bypassed by immigrants willing to get their feet wet, marks the western extent of the U.S.-Mexico border.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Long night shot between two border barriers.</td>
<td>San Diego, California</td>
<td>“A metal wall and a concrete fence impassively bar illegal entry in a floodlit no-man’s-land where Border Patrol agents keep close watch.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Door and screen-like barrier.</td>
<td>Otay Mesa, California</td>
<td>“The hills of California appear dreamlike beyond a section of steel mesh wall with a door that opens only for Border Patrol agents.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dirt road, border wall, piles of tires, stray dog, and neighborhood.</td>
<td>Tijuana, Mexico</td>
<td>“An improvised wall of military surplus steel cuts a rusty slash toward the horizon. In Tijuana, where poverty is rising and half of all new residents live in squatter communities without clean water, the wall is hard to ignore: Houses push up close to the border. On the U.S. side, development is far removed from the barrier.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Flood-lights on boom. Long Night shot. Looks like non-specific open space, like a parking lot.</td>
<td>Calexico, California</td>
<td>“The grass is dying and the shade trees collapsing, but security lights are in full bloom on a former golf course now used for policing the border. Ironically, say some immigration experts, the increasing lockdown can backfire, frightening migrants from attempting the journey home and thus lengthening their stays in the U.S.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Extreme long shot of wall passing between</td>
<td>Andrade, California</td>
<td>“The border wall winds through moonscape, following the demands”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Image Description</td>
<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Long infinity shot of beam-barrier. Sky is blue with pink clouds.</td>
<td>San Luis, Arizona</td>
<td>“On the Arizona side of a vehicle barrier, Border Patrol agents have smoothed the sand with old tires so they can &quot;cut sign&quot;-track the footprints of migrants tempting fate on this remote desert route.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Barricade in desert, surrounded by ocatillo and saguaro.</td>
<td>Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Arizona</td>
<td>Barricades like those that bristled off Normandy beaches on D-Day now guard desert. They stop smugglers of drugs and migrants from driving across the border but let the endangered Sonoran pronghorn pass. Allusions to war are apt: In 2002, before the barriers were in place, drug cartel gunmen killed a U.S. park ranger here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Baseball/softball backstop in first plane, border wall in second plane.</td>
<td>Flagrant Foul</td>
<td>“Border Patrol agents in Nogales, Arizona, protect themselves with an old baseball backstop. Before they put it up, would-be border crossers (or helpers attempting to create a diversion) would toss rocks over the wall in the direction of the agents; now officers park behind it and monitor the border in safety.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>White border fence with multiple small U.S. flags, mesh allows view through.</td>
<td>Naco, Arizona</td>
<td>“Old Glory juts toward the Mexican border as if in warning. Unlike most barriers on the border, the nearly mile-long fence on a local rancher's land was built not by the U.S. government but by a private group, the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, which opposes the influx of illegal immigrants. The group promises that if the government doesn't seal the border, it will.”</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| 12   | Truck bed; Tecate cans; tire; Ocatillo fence and metal border barrier in background. | Backyard Fence | “A homemade fence decorates a backyard in the Sonoran border town of Naco, across the road from the barrier that separates it from the Arizona border town of the same
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<tr>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
<td>Right plane: end of a barbed-wire fence and a monument; Left plane: gravel road stretches towards infinity.</td>
<td>Barren Frontier</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“East of Naco, a monument and a barbed-wire fence mark the U.S.-Mexico border. Formerly Mexican territory, the United States purchased southern reaches of Arizona and New Mexico from Mexico in 1853. Five years before that, at the end of the Mexican-American war, Mexico had ceded to the United States much of the territory that now makes up the southwestern U.S.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td>Statues in first plane, three men in second, and border barrier fence in third.</td>
<td>Cold Comfort</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Figures of Santa Muerte-Saint Death-face north near the border crossing in Agua Prieta, Mexico. The skull-faced object of veneration is not an actual saint of the Roman Catholic Church, but a folklore figure increasingly popular with those who live on the edge-drug runners, coyotes, smugglers.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td>Sculpture on border fence, and view into U.S.</td>
<td>Agua Prieta, Mexico</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Eyes on the border stare into Mexico. &quot;He saw you,&quot; is what Mexican-American artist Alfred Quiroz titled the giant milagro—a traditional amulet for health-bolted to the fence near a major port of entry. The border, where each year a million people are captured and hundreds die trying to sneak north, desperately needs healing, says Quiroz.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td>Extreme long shot of end of corrugated steel barrier; train with cargo cars in the distance.</td>
<td>Ciudad Juárez, Mexico</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>“Freight rolls a few feet north of Mexico on a line repeatedly hit by train robbers unfazed by border fences. Here, the easternmost man-made barrier on the international frontier ends abruptly near the Rio Grande.”</td>
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WORKS CITED


Wright, Melissa. *The Last Frontier: The Contemporary Configuration of the U.S.-
