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BOOK REVIEW

Exploration and exploitation on the 'new frontier'

Gilberto Rosas, *Barrio Libre: criminalizing states and delinquent refusals of the new frontier*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

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Since the post-Cold War deepening of neoliberal globalization and the 1994 implementation of NAFTA, much ink has been spilled over the intertwined histories, economies, and geographies of the United States and Mexico, particularly in the hybrid 'third space' areas of its shared 2,000-mile border. Such works include David E Lorey's *The U.S.-Mexican border in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington, DE, 1999), Lawrence Taylor's *Tunnel Kids* (Tucson, 2001), Victor Davis Hanson's *Mexifornia* (San Francisco, 2003), Kem Nunn's *Tijuana Straits* (New York, 2004), David Spener's *Clandestine Crossings* (Ithaca, NY, 2009), Kelly Lytle Hernandez's study of the U.S. Border Patrol (Berkeley, 2010), and Tom Barry's *Border Wars* (Cambridge, 2011). Scholars and novelists alike have mined the stories, overlapping fates, and trajectories of migratory crossings (legal and illegal), xenophobia, threats of *narco* violence and femicide, *maquiladora* laborers, and the security measures undertaken by both the United States and Mexico to fortify their respective sides of one of the world's most contested international boundaries.

Touching on many of these topics, Gilberto Rosas, an assistant professor of anthropology and Latina/Latino Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, joins this broadening historiography with *Barrio Libre: criminalizing states and delinquent refusals of the new frontier*. Combining Foucaultian notions of state power and sovereignty with heart-wrenching oral histories of *barrio libre*'s inhabitants who exist in a netherworld of petty crime, cheap toxic inhalants, evading authorities, and limited futures, Rosas provides a highly useful, well-researched, and compelling account of life along the border as seen and experienced by its most marginalized actors.

Though he centers on Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, Rosas maintains that *barrio libre* exists in Tucson, Chicago, Los Angeles, and metropolitan areas where Mexicans and other Latinos migrate to work, live, and recreate. As with other scholars who recognize the comparative fluidity of the border region prior to the 1990s, he argues that the Nogales area once contained 'long-standing continuities, residual affiliations, relationships, and vibrant kin networks' but has since devolved into a militarized, polluted, and crime-ridden space that forces residents and workers alike into new networks of violence and criminality (Rosas 2012, p. 5). In addition to NAFTA and neoliberalism, he cites other factors such as low-intensity policing by the U.S. and Mexico, resulting fears from 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror, and the viciousness of drug cartels that compound the already-precarious socioeconomic welfare of those who work in or navigate through *barrio libre*.

Rosas explains that '*barrio libre*' ('free' 'hood') represents both physical space and a set of values. Spatially, he describes *barrio libre* as a shadowy series of tunnels and viaducts that carry sewage and industrial effluent beneath the border. There, Mexican youth peddle or transport drugs, rob would-be crossers, "huff" spray paint, engage in prostitution and human trafficking, and outrun law enforcement. From their delinquent activities in these dark spaces, *barrio libre* actors express values of economic independence (albeit underground), hard-edged survival, and a pointed refusal of border policing, racial profiling, and conservative national security policies. As Román, one of Rosas' subjects explains '*barrio libre* was wherever we were, where we weren't controlled' (Rosas 2012, p. 138). Notably, many of Rosas' other subjects occasionally leave *barrio libre* for Mexico's informal economy, raising gamecocks, working as *taqueros* (taco vendors), exotic dancers, or *pinches* (bus boys). Still others have been deported from the United States. In most cases, *barrio libre* residents return to 'practice their vicious freedoms ... and supplement their collapsing options' (Rosas 2012, p. 64). Via these spaces and ideals, he writes, the men and women of *barrio libre* see their 'gendered, racial, and sexualized orders ... reconstituted' (Rosas 2012, p. 11).

Rosas employs the concept of 'new frontier' in further explaining the personalities and events that marginalize those in *barrio libre*. As problematic as 'frontier' remains in histories of the American West and borderlands studies, Rosas delineates between 'old' and 'new'; the former conjures images of settler colonialism and cultural fluidity among Tejanos, Mexicans, southern slaveholders, and Orientals until border consolidation in the 1920s due to foreign radical hysteria and the United States' first Red Scare. In the 1830s and 1840s, Rosas notes, newly independent Mexico considered those living in the northern reaches (now the area straddling the international boundary) 'marginal to the formation of national consciousness' (Rosas 2012, p. 31). The latter 'new' frontier then, shaped by NAFTA, neoliberalism, and especially transnational concerns of security, impresses the currently marginalized into the subterranean world of *barrio libre*.

One of Rosas' strongest suits is his classification of those marginalized by the dynamics of the new frontier, from the *cholos* and *cholas* (male and female gang members) to the 'summarily dismissed' *chúntaros* or *nacos* ('rural hicks' in urban Mexican parlance) who venture north and hide their savings and possessions from *cholos* and corrupt government officials alike (Rosas 2012, p. 75). While *cholos* and *cholas* in some ways recall the *pachucos* and *pachucas* of World War II-era Los Angeles (and white Angelinos' fears of them), Rosas makes clear that *pachuquismo* was less about criminality and more centered on fashioning a distinctive identity in a whitening metropolis. Conversely, the *cholos/cholas* stereotype (reinforced by fears on both sides of the border) relies on their chosen delinquencies and, seen as new frontier's 'barbarians at the gate', increases anxieties about illegal and undocumented migrations (Rosas 2012, p. 74).

Rosas concludes pessimistically. Despite an emotional attachment to his subjects and genuine concern for their collective well-being, he suggests continual low-intensity conflicts (LICs) waged by both nations against drug cartels and illegal migrants, militarization of the border, American and Mexican 'nightmares of insecurity', and crises of state sovereignty fueled by such conflicts and nightmares will render those of *barrio libre* into 'seething criminal darkness' and pathological trajectories with little hope for betterment. In the end, he notes the lives and activities of those along the new frontier reveal the limits of both individual and nation-states in the age of globalization. *Barrio Libre* will appeal to scholars and students of anthropology, geography, U.S. and Latin American history, international studies, economics, and immigration.

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