Introduction: Nuevas Fronteras / New Frontiers

Technically, I don't qualify as a Chicano. I wasn't born in East L.A. I wasn't born in de southwest U.S.A. I wasn't even born in Méjico. Does dis make me Hispanic? . . . Dese terms, Latino and Hispanic, are inaccurate because dey lump a whole lot of different people into one category. For example, a Mayan from Guatemala, an eSpainard from eSpain and a Chicana/o who speaks no Spanish might all be described, in some circles, as Hispanic. And de term Latino could include people as different as right-wing Cubans living in Miami, exiled Salvadoran leftists, Mexican speakers of Nahuatl, Brazilian speakers of Portuguese, lunfardo-speaking Koreans in Buenos Aires, Nuyoricans (dat's a Puerto Rican who lives in New York) and den dere's de Uruguayans—I mean dey're practically European. . . . As for me, let’s just say . . . I’m a pachuco.

—WIDELOAD MCKENNAH, FRONTERAS AMERICANAS (27)

Guillermo Verdecchia’s 1993 play Fronteras Americanas alternates between two characters, Verdecchia and his alter ego, Facundo Morales Segundo, who prefers the “more Saxonical” name Wideload McKennah (24). In the first act, Wideload interrupts Verdecchia’s learned disquisitions on Latin American history with satirical monologues about Latino stereotypes and “de Saxonian community” (40). As Verdecchia ponders his conflicted relationships with Canada and Argentina, where he was born, Wideload plays ethnographer to the exotic Mr. and Mrs. Smith and their children, Cindy and John, while earning his “doctorate in Chicana/o estudies” (35). Having arrived in Argentina by the end of the first act, Verdecchia returns “home” to Canada in the second, finding himself increasingly depressed and confused about the nature of home until he realizes, “I’m not in Canada; I’m not in Argentina. I’m on the Border. I am home” (74). Wideload, meanwhile, has traded his jester’s persona for commentary “en serio” about how “we are re-drawing the map of America because economics, [he’s] told, knows no borders” (76).

The character Verdecchia embraces his own inner borders and divisions as a defensive counter to the dehumanizing forces of globalization Wideload describes. The surprising turn in these not-so-novel ideas comes in linking them with Argentine-Canadian figures who cross pachuco cool with literary lions of the Southern Cone. Domingo Sarmiento’s
Facundo (1845) is a classic of Argentine and Latin American literature. In it, Sarmiento tells the story of the caudillo Juan Facundo Quiroga and rails against the regime of Juan Manuel de Rosas, while developing a theory of Latin American culture and strongman rule. The pachuco is the iconic figure of resistance embodied in Mexican American youth culture of the 1940s, popularized in Luis Valdez’s play Zoot Suit (1972) about the 1943 race riots in Los Angeles between Mexican and Anglo-Americans.

Besides reminding readers that pachucos wore their hair in a style referred to as the “Argentine duck-tail” (Sherrow 146), what can Verdecchia’s bringing together of Facundo and pachuco cool tell us about latindad, the hemisphere, and the future of Chicana/o literary studies? How does Facundo get to Toronto and what does it mean for him to be there? Chicano Nations: The Hemispheric Origins of Mexican American Literature takes up a similar set of questions. Before crossing an indeterminate border in Fronteras Americanas, the character Verdecchia tells the audience to set their watches to “border time” where “it is now Zero hour” (22). At the end of the play he asks the audience to reset their watches, informing them that they “still have time [to] go forwards. Towards the centre, towards the border” (78). Chicano Nations charts that centering journey and resets the literary, historical watch by pushing the boundaries of Chicana/o time and remapping Chicana/o space.

Chicano Nations tells a story about spatial thinking in the Americas. Here, I explore the confluence of space, race, and nation, as well as how the geopolitical divisions of the period immediately following the disintegration of the Spanish empire, the early nineteenth century, helped codify racial thinking in the Americas and create a de facto Latino collectivity in the United States. It is not, I argue, nostalgia for the putatively lost land of Aztlán, the imaginary homeland of the Aztecs, that grounds Chicana/o imaginings of the nation but a deeper, older, transamerican vision.1 Chicano Nations aims to reclaim and reinsert this vision into discussions of the Chicana/o cultural imaginary.

I turn to the nation in order to flesh out a Chicana/o literary genealogy grounded in hemispheric and transnational debates. Since Napoleon’s 1808 invasion of Spain, which precipitated Mexican and Latin American independence, Mexican American writing has been grappling with what the nation means, searching for a way to work around its imperial underpinnings and racial logic, increasingly so after the Mexican-American War (1846–48). Chicana/o literature, I contend, is characterized by a deep ambivalence about the nation running through a diverse body of works. My central project is to situate that ambivalence in the history of
spatial debate in the Americas. In the chapters that follow, I focus on how American space is imagined in the wake of empire. I look at how that space changes over time and through debates about nation formation and Pan-Americanism in the hemisphere, and finally, I show Chicana/o nationalism to be part of this long, transamerican conversation.

*Fronteras Americanas* assumes that something called “America” or “the Americas” exists, that we can know it, understand it, and trace its genealogy. *Chicano Nations* builds on this assumption by asserting the Americas less as bounded space and more as an idea, or network, whose contours, meanings, and participants are constantly in flux. In *Chicano Nations* I emphasize process over product; I do not document the literature of the Americas so much as ask why the Americas exist, what “America” means at different points in time, how its shifting meanings inform ethnic and cultural identities in the United States, and finally, how understanding the motile terrains of space, place, and subjectivity might ground a vision of humanity’s future.

Like Verdecchia, the primarily Mexican and Mexican American writers and intellectuals I turn to in these explorations have written about the racial dimensions of space; also like Verdecchia, they have articulated a transamerican imaginary that undermines a precise cultural nationalism and troubles their inclusion in Chicana/o literary history. The scope of their visions, however, as I will show in the following chapters, strengthens, bolsters, and expands *chicanismo* at the same time it poses serious challenges. While *Chicano Nations*’ concerns are rooted in a particular, material, and geopolitical place, this project is also concerned with spatial imaginings and philosophies more abstractly. After all, if we ask, “What is America?” we have also to ask, “What is a nation? How does it create national space?” Even further: “What is space? How is it represented? How do we see and imagine ourselves in it?” These questions are at *Chicano Nations*’ conceptual center.

**Spatial Thinking**

These spatial queries also have a very long, rich intellectual history in geography and the social sciences, with physical geographers searching for ever more precise means of measuring space and human geographers pondering its metaphysics. Both approaches have their limitations, of course. While they presuppose objective, spatial truths, empirical methods actually offer their own murky, subjective knowledge. Anne Godlewska has described the map, for example, as “part of an arsenal
of coercive tools designed to reinforce particular aspects of the social structure” that reflect domestic and international conflict (21). Further, the impulse to define space precisely leads to spatial distortions like those resulting from the Mercator projection, which enlarges objects as their distance from the equator increases, making northern spaces such as Europe and the United States appear larger than they actually are (27). The drive toward spatial knowledge thus pushes us further from spatial truths, as Michael Goodchild admits in a discussion of recent developments in geographical information systems, which make representations of aggregate data possible. It is, however, increasingly difficult, says Goodchild, to represent data’s complexity and uncertainty (80).

Human geographers, by contrast, eschew empiricism in favor of human experiences of place and space. In the late 1970s, geography experienced an urban, sociological turn during which the idea of space as relative and relational began to take hold (Hubbard, Kitchen, and Valentine 5). In Social Justice and the City (1973), for instance, David Harvey argues that a city’s built infrastructure codifies class inequality, and Immanuel Wallerstein’s work on the world system illuminates how geopolitical divisions enforce the global division of labor. The 1991 translation from French into English of Henri Lefebvre’s The Production of Space brought his ideas squarely to the fore of Anglo-American criticism. There, Lefebvre argues that absolute space cannot exist since the instant of human-spatial interaction renders space relative and historical.

Modernity, Lefebvre writes, produces spaces with “specific characteristics: homogeneity-fragmentation-hierarchy” (Key Writings 210). Homogeneity facilitates surveillance and social control, but it produces a false unity because this homogeneous space is actually quite fragmented and parcelled out among various owner-interests. These fragmented spaces—ghettos, commercial and residential zones, and so forth—are then arranged in a hierarchy of relationships to centers of production and civic life. “This space,” Lefebvre observes, “exerts a curious logic . . . which hides real relationships and conflicts behind its homogeneity” while achieving a level of general abstraction affecting learning, culture, and social life (210).

Against these abstracting moves Lefebvre posits what Edward Soja refers to as a spatial “trialectics” in which space can be understood as perceived (through unreflective daily life), conceived (with maps and other tools of spatial abstraction), and lived (Thirdspace 61). Lived space enacts the emergence of place as a kind of space defined by conscious, social engagement. Yi Fu Tuan, whose work I take up explicitly in Chapter 6, builds on Lefebvre’s spatial trialectics to further theorize place as made
space, emphasizing that people live not within geometric planes but in a rich world of mutable meanings constructed from their daily, spatial engagements. Lefebvre sees place-making as a counter to the homogenizing forces of capital, though the precise relationship between the two processes remains under-theorized in his work, as he himself admits. “Could there not emerge,” he asks, nevertheless, “through and against hierarchization, here and there, in architectural and planning terms, some thing that comes out of the existing mode of production, that is born from its contradictions by exposing them and not by covering them with a veil?” (212). Lived space, in other words, has the potential to work through capital’s spatial contradictions and oppressions.

The idea of this potential informs my reading, in Chicano Nations, of the transamerican places imagined by the authors included herein as grounds for progressive social change. Their American imaginaries, I argue, offer the possibility of transcending the racial inconsistencies of the empirical nation-state. In this attention to space, place, and identity I follow in Mary Pat Brady’s and Raúl Villa’s footsteps who, in Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies and Barrio-Logos, respectively, address human geography’s lack of attention to race and sexuality by applying Lefebvre’s and Soja’s theories to Chicana/o negotiations of U.S. space and place. My contribution to this discussion is to use the long history of Chicana/o literature to move beyond the local spaces of chicanismo documented by Brady and Villa to show how the desire to create and contain Chicana/o spaces is part of a larger story about the partitioning of hemispheric space.

Beyond documenting a Chicana/o national imaginary, then, a fundamental task Chicano Nations takes up is constructing its genealogy, excavating its etymology, and exploring its meanings and contradictions. I ask how the contradictions of a Chicana/o national imaginary—like the spatial contradictions of capitalism Lefebvre notes—resonate with a larger network of geopolitical tensions glossed over by el movimiento (the Chicana/o civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s). My readings of relatively iconoclastic Chicana/o authors demonstrate the enduring globality of local consciousness and reveal the contradictions that emerge from a nation’s desire to obfuscate the political, cultural, and historical reality of its global interconnection.

The Space of Chicana/o Nationalism

My decision to ground chicanismo in that larger, spatial story by looking at representations of the nation in Chicana/o literature from 1834
to 2008 is perhaps counterintuitive since Chicana/o nationalism is quite narrowly defined in Chicana/o cultural studies and “Chicana/o” is understood in historically specific terms. Chicana/o nationalism is often conceived as coalescing around the imagined space of Aztlan; it is also typically thought, following Américo Paredes in With His Pistol in His Hand (1958), to have its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, during the Southwest’s violent transition from Mexican to U.S. rule. The following chapters will redraw that map, however, expand the historical and geographic scope of chicanismo, and make imaginary spaces real. Aztlan is part of a broad geographic and historical continuum, a vast network of transnational latinidad, within which, I argue, Chicana/o nationalism must be understood.

In the Chicana/o cultural imaginary, however, nationalism is difficult to separate from the homophobia and sexism of 1960s and 1970s Chicana/o politics, and it is further complicated when considering the feminist critique of nationalism, as well as immigration into the United States from Central and South America during the 1980s. Chicana/o nationalism is often understood as an ethnic nationalism that makes specious claims to Aztlan, grounding Chicana/o identity in an embrace of indigeneity, working-class roots, the myth of an Aztec heritage, and the patriarchal family. Political rhetoric surrounding Aztlan and Chicana/o nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, such as “El Plan de Aztlan” formulated at the 1969 First National Chicana/o Youth Conference in Denver, was galvanizing. The militant, masculine, and heteronormative identity it set forth, however, fractured under the pressure of internal feminist and queer critiques, diminishing its capacity as an organizing tool.

Chicana/o nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s sought to reify Chicana/o identity in ways similar to the workings of most ethnic nationalist movements, as Étienne Balibar describes them in his essay “Racism and Nationalism.” In Balibar’s analysis, the objectification of such identities ignores the fact that they emerge over time. Ethnic and racial categories are neither monolithic nor objective, and their very subjectivity undermines an ethnic nationalist project, he argues. Chicana/o studies has made similar arguments, the most well-known appearing in Gloria Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking work Borderlands/La Frontera (1987). Since the queer, feminist theoretical moment crystallized in Anzaldúa’s work, invocations of the nation in Chicana/o literature are seen as reflecting one of two things: a militant, separatist politics or a disavowal of ethnic solidarity in favor of assimilation into U.S. culture. The productive and
galvanizing force of the national idea has since, however, been dismissed, as Miguel López notes in Chicano Timespace (2001).4

Thus, the story of nationalism in Chicana/o cultural studies works as a progress narrative in which we move from patriarchal nationalism to an enlightened inter- or transnationalism in which Chicana/o subjectivities correlate to hybrid Chicana/o spaces, or border zones. Chicano Nations asks what happens to this story when we shift perspective and see Chicana/o nationalism developing in other times and other spaces. What happens when the space we want to identify as “Chicana/o” or “Mexican” or “Aztlán” emerges as transnational and multivalent, not newly so but historically and constitutively?

Thinking of globalization as a process beginning long before the 1947 international conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, which established the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, forces us to think about earlier periods of Chicana/o history much differently and to see their relationship to our contemporary moment in increasingly complex terms. The nineteenth century appears much more inter-American and transnational when we understand the southwestern United States as part of a hemispheric, even global, network of market forces. We also see, in this period, Mexico and Latin America resisting U.S. continental and hemispheric rhetoric in ways that closely resemble Chicana/o responses to U.S. racial realities post-9/11. This dual embrace and resistance of hemispherism is evident throughout the long history of Chicana/o literature and culture. The transnation has always held power and promise, the threat of imperial dominance and the possibility of transcendence; and the ambivalence about the nation so characteristic of Chicana/o literature must be understood in terms of a hemispheric and global resistance to the racializing and excluding work of nations.

Negotiating Movimiento Nuance

Such a reading of Chicana/o nationalism as grounded in a hemispheric history of ambivalence and uncertainty is difficult to negotiate, however, in Chicana/o literary studies, and in many ways my hemispheric approach takes issue with the geographic parochialism of Chicana/o studies, which has its roots in movimiento ideological conflict. José Limón’s impassioned defense of “critical regionalism” as an alternative strategy to José Saldívar’s “critical globalization” (“Border Literary Histories” 166) reflects longstanding intellectual and organizational fissures within Chicana/o scholarship and activism clearly evident in Chicana/o
cultural production of *el movimiento*. *El movimiento* and its writers have been mythologized and vilified in such a way as to obscure the very real debates concerning political philosophy and cultural production that preoccupied movement activists. These are the same tensions between the global and the national grounding the long history of Chicana/o literature, a history that begins long before Gregorio Cortez ever picked up a pistol or Zachary Taylor crossed the Nueces, tensions beautifully exemplified by Buffalo Zeta Brown, the charismatic lawyer-activist who is Oscar Acosta’s literary alter ego.

In *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) Brown connects the Chicana/o struggle in Los Angeles to the conflict in Vietnam and develops a global vision of “the Cockroach people” as “the little beasts that everyone steps on” (135). Yet, at a student rally at UCLA, he berates the mostly white crowd for the attention it pays, from a position of unthreatened privilege, to a distant Vietnam at the expense of local inequities right down the road. “When the fires start up,” he asks the crowd angrily, “when the pigs come to take us all, what will you do? Will you hide behind your skin? . . . Will you join up with the Chicanos and blacks? Or will you run back to the homes of your fathers in Beverly Hills, in Westwood, in Canoga Park?” (180). Limón’s criticisms of Saldívar’s very influential book *Border Matters* (1997), with its “hurried globalizing reading of this complex regional experience [of life in south Texas]” (Limón, “Border Literary Histories” 164), finds its antecedent in Brown’s critique of the UCLA protestors and the Chicana/o Militants’ anger at Brown, later in the novel, for disappearing to Mexico at a crucial time in their organizing (Acosta 196–97). Throughout Chicana/o scholarship and culture runs the suspicion that a shift in focus from the immediacy of Chicana/o experiences in the United States, or on the border, signals a shift away from “real” Chicana/o concerns.

Brown’s desire to connect the local with the global is not usually addressed in scholarship on the novel. A similar critical myopia has informed the reception of *movimiento* poet Alurista (the pen name of Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia), who began publishing his poems in the 1960s, is still publishing in the twenty-first century, and is referred to by some as the Chicana/o poet laureate. Alurista’s work epitomizes the central conflicts in Chicana/o literary studies, as well as the tension between locality and globality expressed in the critical dispute between Limón and Saldívar. His early poetry gives voice to Chicana/o experience, yet as his writing develops he begins to critique and problematize the nature of the individual, experience, history, and culture, even the existence of
a discrete speaking subject, the very terms upon which affirmations of chicanismo were built. The nation, both real and imagined, is a primary metaphor through which this shift in Alurista’s poetics is evident. It surfaces again and again in his work as a paradoxical signifier of colonial capitalist enterprise and grassroots international unity. Alurista exploits this paradox in order to put forth a global perspective that privileges national differences. This paradox is manifest in the concept of Aztlan, which, through the preamble to “El Plan,” Alurista is widely credited with introducing into the Chicana/o lexicon. “El Plan,” which has been roundly criticized for its silencing of Chicana and queer concerns with specious claims to communal homogeneity, actually puts forward experiential notions of Aztlan that argue for the national imaginary as a global humanizing force, a nuance that, like Brown’s internationalism, is often lost on Alurista’s detractors.

Alurista’s unpublished poem “History of Aztlan” illuminates his political and poetic aims for Aztlan. The poem offers visions of mestiza nations, independence on a bronze continent, and the connections between blood, labor, nation, and North America to which “El Plan” alludes but does not elaborate. “History of Aztlan” describes the historical progression of Aztlan from that which unified pre-Columbian, artistic Toltecs with the warlike Chichimecs to that which will unify contemporary Latin American nations in their fight against multinational capital.

While Alurista may have intended Aztlan to serve as an abstract concept, other activists understood Aztlan materially, as the Aztec homeland. Alurista’s transformative, unifying metaphor is lost in the struggle between the two positions. But a lexical shift in “History of Aztlan” gives powerful voice to Alurista’s unifying metaphor and shows how separate nations can come together as a collective, humanizing force. Toward the end of the poem, Aztlan becomes Amerindia, a term Alurista also uses freely in interviews. This slippage from Aztlan to Amerindia (indigenous America) in the poem and Alurista’s colloquial use of Amerindia are significant, often overlooked elements of how Alurista understands Aztlan. If Aztlan is the Chicana/o homeland, then it is also something more; it is the idea of unification in the face of divisive, colonialist control.

Aztlan, as Alurista theorized it, is local and global, yet Chicana/o studies has a difficult time reconciling this complexity, as evidenced in the debate between Limon and Saldívar, as well as the field’s critical turn away from nationalism. Recent work in Chicana/o studies has placed much emphasis on the global or transnational dimensions of Chicana/o culture. Ellie Hernández’s Postnationalism in Chicana/o Literature and
Culture (2009), for example, correlates the global to a series of flexible, novel identities unavailable within a rigid, patriarchal, national structure. Hernández’s work exemplifies the attraction of Limón’s “critical globalization” for Chicana/o studies scholars who have embraced the transnation as a way to work around the conceptual difficulties posed by the nation, both real and imaginary. In Chicano Nations I seek to restore the critical multivalence of Alurista’s Aztlán, of the nation, to the study of Chicana/o literature. Aztlán and the Chicana/o national imaginary it has come to reference are part of the interactional space of the transnational latinidad traced in this book.

One might reasonably ask, then, why I argue so strenuously for a flexible chicanismo rather than abandoning a moniker whose inconsistencies and philosophical limitations I have taken pains to enumerate. It is vitally important to think of the authors in this study as Chicana/o because they are of Mexican descent and that mexicanidad engenders a unique relationship to the United States that is very similar to that of Latin America but historically very different as well. The United States absorbed nearly half of Mexico in 1848, and the essence of chicanismo lies in negotiating that engulfment. I intend “Chicana/o” as the lexical equivalent of the serpent eating its own tail or of the two-headed serpent’s confrontation with its own other as it emerges from Coatlique’s neck. Insisting on “Chicana/o” illuminates the theoretical problem this book takes on: the local’s imbrication with the global. The Chicana/o struggle in the United States is intimately connected with the global struggle against oppression, as Buffalo Brown passionately argues, and Chicana/o studies must understand that globality in order to parse the ever-changing dimensions of chicanismo. We must also understand that a global, Chicana/o consciousness is not simply a function of a putative post-NAFTA, postmodern enlightenment but very much a part of a hemispheric, Latina/o sensibility and a function of the transnational latinidad that lies at the heart of this study.

As the Hemisphere Turns?

My hemispheric approach to the study of Chicana/o literature has its dangers, however. Just as Chicana/o studies scholars embraced the transnation as a way to work around patriarchal nationalism, so too have U.S.-based American studies scholars embraced a hemispheric framework as a critical evasion of U.S. hegemony. But, just as Chicana/o studies has a tendency to repress its own troubling prehistory, so too does the
hemispheric turn in U.S.-based American studies scholarship, of which *Chicano Nations* can be considered a part, run the risk of falling into an intellectual solipsism that mirrors U.S. geopolitical dominance.

Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease heralded the beginning of American studies’ hemispheric turn with their anthology *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993), which examined U.S. culture through the lens of U.S. imperial conflict abroad. A range of provocative studies of U.S. literature followed in Kaplan and Pease’s wake. As Ralph Bauer cogently reminds us, however, this hemispheric turn, while new to U.S.-based American studies, is hardly novel. Its critical tradition stems from the moment Herbert Bolton, in his 1932 presidential address to the American Historical Association, challenged that organization to consider whether or not the Americas had a common history (Bauer, “Hemispheric Studies” 234). Since then, inter-American scholarship that considers the hemisphere from across the disciplines has flourished with, as Bauer notes, a sharp increase in the late 1990s when U.S.-based American studies shifted its perspective from “a United States centered multiculturalism toward a trans- and postnationalism” (“Hemispheric Studies” 235).

The new hemispheric American studies that followed from Janice Radway’s exhortation, in her 1998 presidential address to the American Studies Association, to cease conflating “America” with the United States, was based largely in English and American studies departments, had its methodological roots in U.S. multiculturalism, and, as Bauer recounts, irked Latin Americanists and others who had been engaged in inter-American scholarship for many years, with its pretensions to novelty and its focus on the United States in a hemispheric context (“Hemispheric Studies” 236–37). This focus foregrounds the hegemony of the U.S. nation-state and the artificiality of borders, coalescing around postcolonial readings of race. Hemispheric American studies thus differs substantially from inter-American or Latin American scholarship in that the former seeks to leave behind an imperial nationalism while the latter has tended to see the nation as a protective counter to U.S. dominance.

Conceptions of the Americas thus can differ subtly yet substantially, as the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos argues in his essay “Bolivarismo y monroísmo” (1934). “Bolivarism is the Hispanic American idea of creating a Spanish cultural federation,” he writes. “Monroism is the Anglo Saxon idea of incorporating the twenty Hispanic nations into a Nordic empire by means of a panamerican politics” (1305). Vasconcelos emphasizes the political histories of critical language, a point Walter Mignolo also makes in *The Idea of Latin America*, where he describes
Latinidad as a nineteenth-century French ideological project designed to assert control in the region and identifies “Latin America” less as a material space and more abstractly as a political tool of elite criollos (colonists born in the “new” world) as they established a postcolonial identity (58–59). Similarly, Arturo Ardao traces the term “latinoamericanismo” to France and, like Vasconcelos, describes “panamericanismo” and “Pan-America” as part of U.S. efforts to dominate the Americas (157). Ardao sees “interamericanismo” as a variant of Pan-Americanism (170) and extends his list of problematic terms to include “Panamericana” (158), “americanismo” (166), and “hispanoamericano” (166), each of which connotes, to some extent, the region’s continuing subordination to Western powers.

Ardao’s lexical stringency leaves scholars little room to maneuver, but in this study I have chosen to use “transamerica” to refer to the vision I see my authors developing of hemispheric connection and progressive social change. “Transamerica” adumbrates the physical spaces my writers move within while remaining attentive to the fraught narrative history of the region. Though a transamerican ideal does originate with white-identified elites, it does so in conjunction with their growing awareness of their own racialization in U.S.-dominated American space, as I argue in Chapter 1. Thus, imbricated in the hemispheric, at times global, vision of the nineteenth-century writers I discuss are the theoretical foundations for a progressive politics of global humanism, which is, in my final analysis, the value and potential of Chicana/o literature.

In broadening “Chicana/o” in this way, in reading Chicana/o nationalism as an unsuccessful attempt to resolve contradictions in Mexican American identity, in situating the literal and metaphorical nation hemispherically and focusing on nationalism as a function of a narrative relation to the past, Chicano Nations seeks to define “Chicana/o” and chicanismo as something other than oppositional and anti-Anglo. Such an approach undercuts traditional notions of “identity” by understanding “Chicana/o” to be less experiential and reactionary and more of an historical process. Chicana/o consciousness, in the analyses that follow, exists as an evolving project to think through the nation in philosophically productive ways that transcend the oppositions of identity politics.

Consequently, Chicano Nations makes three significant interventions in the study of Chicana/o literature and U.S. literature more broadly: first, it dislodges the United States as the cultural center to which Chicana/o literature responds; second, it puts Chicana/o literature in the context of political and cultural debates in Latin America, a move that shifts
the focus of U.S. ethnic studies from an exercise in U.S. exceptionalism toward a global theory of race; and third, it develops a model for reading earlier Chicana/o texts as a meaningful part of Chicana/o literary history, something that has heretofore eluded scholars.

Thus, while Chicano Nations explores a global and hemispheric context for Chicana/o literature, the readings that follow remain invested in the nation as both political reality and abstract imaginary. In the same way that some scholars maintain a healthy suspicion of a potentially colonizing hemispherism, Chicano Nations seeks a balance between transamerican potential and national realities. Other recent studies have moved in a similar direction, and while they have broadened readings of chicanismo, Chicano Nations seeks to extend the historical and geographic horizons of these representative studies. Following Manuel Martín-Rodríguez’s claims in Life in Search of Readers (2003), however, I argue that we cannot draw a direct representational line from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first. Martín-Rodríguez calls for an approach to Chicana/o literary history that realizes the fundamental contradiction between the heterogeneity of a Mexican American past and historiographic tendencies toward homogenization. Chicano Nations makes just this sort of intervention.

The Adventures of Ali, Ali, and the Writers

Included in Chicano Nations

I wish to remind you, at this crucial juncture in our shared geographies, dat under dose funny voices and under dose funny images of de Frito Bandito and under all this talk of Money and Markets there are living, breathing, dreaming men, women and children... Consider those here first. Consider those I have not considered. Consider your parents, consider your grandparents. Consider the country. Consider the continent. Consider the border. —WIDELOAD, FRONTERAS AMERICANAS (76)

OK, it’s OK if you don’t want to stop jihad because, from what we can tell, here in the postmodern, post-industrial West, it is not your actions that count so much as your image. —ALI ABABWA TO OSAMA BIN LADEN IN THE ADVENTURES OF ALI AND ALI AND THE AXES OF EVIL (115)

Chicano Nations explores the transformations of national space and national imaginaries in Chicana/o literature. It traces a broad, historical arc from the deconstruction of the Spanish empire’s borders and the construction of national borders in the Americas, the multiple Latina/o
identities and racial epistemologies those borders engender, to border morphology post-9/11 and the continual transformation of Americans and the Americas. I am interested here in the ebbs and flows of space and place, people, borders, and the possibility of transnational \textit{latinidad} to profoundly reorient our understanding of the racialized logic of the nation-state.

\textit{Chicano Nations} comprises three parts: “Imagining the Americas,” “Inhabiting America,” and “American Diasporas,” each of which explores the grounding, evolution, contemporary manifestation, and future possibility of a hemispheric vision for Chicana/o literature. “Chicana/o” is itself as fraught a term as the transamerican networks of influence it aims to suture. “Chicana/o” resonates hemispherically and is tightly connected to longstanding debates in Latin American literature and culture about the nation’s relationship to the hemisphere. This book is therefore organized around three moments of \textit{international} pressure on what it means to be Mexican and what it means to be Mexican in the United States. These three moments—Latin American independence and U.S. expansion, the Mexican Revolution, and September 11, 2001—chart the emergence of race in inter-American mappings, both cartographic and narrative, and demonstrate the containment and expression of racial ideologies. These historical markers are key flashpoints in Chicana/o history tracing at the outset the creation of new national boundaries and subsequent articulation of new racial identities; then, the first major challenge to the north-south divide of the U.S.-Mexico border and the spatial identities it engenders as immigration north from Mexico increases dramatically before and during the revolution; and finally, 9/11, which marks a radical shift in the shape and feel of national borders that fundamentally redefines the space of \textit{chicanismo} and the meaning of transnational \textit{latinidad}.

The book charts several different journeys, one of which is captured in the distance between Verdecchia’s \textit{Fronteras Americanas}, with which this introduction opens, and a later play, \textit{The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil} (2005), cowritten with Caymar Chai and Marcus Youssef. \textit{Fronteras Americanas} describes a Latina/o subject split between an imaginary homeland and the reality of living as an Argentine in Canada, a story fleshed out in the first two parts of \textit{Chicano Nations}. “Imagining the Americas” describes the emergence of a Chicana/o national imaginary in the nineteenth century while “Inhabiting America” focuses on the racialized subjects living in the United States in the early twentieth century. \textit{Ali and Ali}, which is about traveling performers from
Agraba, a fictitious Middle Eastern country, examines the impact of both the War on Terror and liberal hypocrisy on Western ethnic identities and stereotypes. “American Diasporas,” the final part of *Chicano Nations*, enacts this explicitly global turn in examining the meaning and historicity of post-9/11 *chicanismo*.

In Part 1 of *Chicano Nations*, “Imagining the Americas,” I stake my central claim that Chicana/o literature has always had a hemispheric, even global, vision. The two chapters included in this part—“Latinidad Abroad” and “Mexicanidad at Home”—trace the emergence and evolution of a transamerican ideal in Latina/o arts and letters. My goal here is to show how Mexican and Mexican American writers participated in that dialogue, and in my analyses I place particular emphasis on putting them in conversation with political and cultural debates in Mexico and Latin America. These two chapters illuminate the hemispheric network out of which concepts like the global and transnational emerge, as well as the long, intellectual histories of the principles of anti-racism and anti-colonial struggle, which are primarily associated with twentieth-century *chicanismo*.

Chapter 1, “Latinidad Abroad,” examines three narratives written by Mexican and Latin American travelers in the United States in the early nineteenth century. Mexican politician Lorenzo de Zavala’s *Viaje a los Estados Unidos del Norte de América* (1834), along with the Argentine Domingo Sarmiento’s *Viajes por . . . América 1845–1847* and the Chilean Vicente Pérez Rosales’s “Algo Sobre California” (1850), illustrate a hemispheric racial ideology wherein the United States constructs Latin America as an infantile other to be drawn under the cloak of U.S. protection. In producing a vision of the United States for Mexican and Latin American consumption, these writers must mediate the internal contradictions of their own burgeoning nationalisms while grappling with increasing U.S. hemispheric dominance. Zavala, Sarmiento, and Pérez Rosales begin, each in his own way, to reconcile their national ambitions with a hemispheric ideal that potentially transcends the liberal state.

Their hemispherism works in productive tension with the galvanizing nationalisms of nineteenth-century Latin America. Taken together, they demonstrate how writing, particularly travel writing, becomes a core function of state making and how it parses public concerns about the state, citizenship, and the racial composition of the body politic. From Zavala to Sarmiento to Pérez Rosales we note the increasing racialization of Mexicans and Latin Americans in the United States. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century Chicana/o cultural production hinges on the links
forged between race and nation that we see emerging here in each writer’s attempts to narrate a transnational space. Reading Zavala in conjunction with his Latin American contemporaries establishes a broader referential context for his Viaje and consequently for the formation of Chicana/o literature.

Chapter 2, “Mexicanidad at Home,” builds on this context in its explorations of the literary connection between the historian and publisher Hubert Bancroft and Mariano Vallejo in late nineteenth-century San Francisco. In Literary Industries, his 1890 memoir, Bancroft describes his relationship with Vallejo, the former Mexican military commander of Alta California. Bancroft convinced Vallejo to contribute his own recollections to Bancroft’s historical project, recollections that eventually became Vallejo’s five-volume Recuerdos Historicos y Personales Tocante a la Alta California (Historical and Personal Recollections Touching upon Alta California). In this chapter I consider Vallejo’s Recuerdos in relation to Bancroft’s Works, investigating the intersections of historical narrative with nationalist sentiment. The two men’s respective histories of California reveal complex processes of national identification at work, processes that suggest new ways of thinking through both the role that wealthy rancheros play in Chicana/o literary history and the applicability of terms like “transnationalism” and “globalization” to the nineteenth century.

Critics have read testimonios like Vallejo’s as textual evidence of the consolidation of californio identity as a racialized, proletarianized community collectively oppressed by Anglo-American dominance. The testimonios are generally seen as regional in scope and, though they point to broader national trends in racism and class struggle, they are rarely seen as speaking to transnational or global concerns. Here I ask how we can understand Vallejo’s place in Chicana/o literary history as something other than a narrative of loss, conquest, racialization, and woe. While testimonios such as Vallejo’s do reflect the rise of Anglo-American power in California, that rise adumbrates a number of other social, political, and economic factors as well. Mexican Californians were both subjects and objects of these forces, and a full reading of texts such as Vallejo’s must understand them as such. Teasing out processes of Mexican American racialization in California through an analysis of Bancroft’s and Vallejo’s histories reveals how philosophies of history and economics manifest themselves in narrations of the nation, offering more nuanced ways to understand interracial and international relations and texts.

While “Imagining the Americas” puts the emergence of Chicana/o
literature in the wider context of nineteenth-century Pan-American debates, Part 2, “Inhabiting America,” tracks the development of those national imaginaries in the early twentieth century. This part focuses on how literature represents the reality of living as a Mexican in the United States. As the transamerican dream shared by the writers of Part 1 fades, Part 2 pays attention to the intertwining of space and race at the turn of the century. As national spaces codify so does the idea of a national race, and the two chapters in this part ask how notions of race, ethnicity, and nation evolve during this period, taking on the oppositional cast of later twentieth-century activism. At the same time, in fleshing out the roots of this oppositional subjectivity, Part 2 examines the nuances and complexities of early twentieth-century chicanismo, tracing the fault lines of intracommunal class and race tensions, which contribute to the diversity of Chicana/o communities but regularly go unnoted in scholarly studies. These two chapters work to integrate that diversity and tension into Chicana/o literary history while rooting them in the transnational debates of the nineteenth century.

“Racialized Bodies and the Limits of the Abstract,” Chapter 3, discusses María Mena and Daniel Venegas as two authors whose writings straddle the Mexican Revolution. Their writing reflects two disparate, diasporic Mexican communities who eventually do become part of a Chicana/o collectivity in the United States. The tensions of class, race, gender, and nation evident in their works are exacerbated in comparison with each other and are foundational to intracommunal Chicana/o conflicts. The political alliances reflected in their writings mark the inception of the fissures and camps characteristic of later twentieth-century Chicana/o political and cultural production.

Mena and Venegas inhabit “America” at the same time that the United States is trying to inhabit Latin America. Their writings embrace and refute otherness; they try to both define and embody an idealized Mexico while simultaneously critiquing the essentializing logic of an idealized nationality. In short, Mena’s and Venegas’s writing is a window into the moment when Chicana/o literature incorporates the idea of its own race. That incorporation results in myriad contradictions and inconsistencies evident in Mena’s and Venegas’s disparate approaches to the question of what Mexico means. The political conflict evident in reading them against each other is one of the constitutive political tensions of Chicana/o literature: between the materiality and the abstraction of race.

Chapter 4, “More Life in the Skeleton,” dwells on the distinction
between the lived experience of race and the political expediency of racial abstraction. The chapter opens with an analysis of two different artistic renderings of a skeleton, by Mexican and Anglo artists, encountered by the reader early in Jovita González and Eve Raleigh’s novel *Caballero* (written in 1937 but not published until 1996). The artistic differences the narrators describe articulate the ineffable significance of race, a project taken up also by José Vasconcelos in his essay “La raza cósmica” (1925). Vasconcelos is concerned with the future possibility of race, not the lived present. He sees *mestizaje* (racial mixing) as the key to human uplift and is not concerned in his writing with what it means to actually live as a mestizo in either Mexico or the United States.

*Caballero* bridges the divide between these two poles. Like “La raza cósmica,” the novel seeks a new racial epistemology that moves beyond the capitalist logic of nations, and, like both Mena’s and Venegas’s works, the novel must contend with the lived experience of racial oppression. Like “La raza cósmica,” *Caballero* postulates a new model of racial thinking that is about neither assimilation nor Anglo supremacy but total spiritual uplift, and like Vasconcelos’s essay *Caballero* posits a complex and contradictory theory of historical time that undermines nationalist logic. Because *Caballero* critiques Mexican nationalism and does not reflect an easily recognizable, oppositional Chicana/o politics, it, like “La raza cósmica,” is most often read as making conservative, elitist, and assimilationist arguments about race and nation. In this chapter I read *Caballero* in the context of Vasconcelos’s essay in order to bring forth both texts’ internationalist arguments. Shedding light on them helps situate both in the rich tradition of nationalist debate that *Chicano Nations* traces.

The long history of this debate is occluded, in Chicana/o studies scholarship, by *el movimiento*. This was a remarkable and galvanizing time, but its lionization in the critical canon has severely limited our ability to appreciate what came before and after. The critical work of articulating Chicana/o identity and experience, performed by political and cultural activists of *el movimiento*, was crucial, if anomalous in its hermeticism and militancy. The fluid geopolitical and personal borders characteristic of feminist and queer work of the 1980s and 1990s, while often seen as a response to *movimiento* patriarchy and homophobia, are actually better understood as part of the long history of hemispheric exchange outlined in this study.

From the early twentieth century, therefore, I move to its close and the dawn of the twenty-first, during which time Chicana/o literature is
dealing with the same internal identity crises occasioned by the waves of Mexican immigration during the 1920s. Part 3, “American Diasporas,” looks at how Chicana/o literature incorporates the tectonic shifts occasioned by the Central American migrations of this period and how assertions of U.S. power abroad shape domestic, ethnic tensions. The two chapters in “American Diasporas” explore how borders change, the impact of immigration on Chicana/o communities, and the effect of September 11, 2001, on literary representations of space, place, belonging, and ethnicity in the United States. The political conflicts of the early twenty-first century are novel, and yet they return Chicana/o literature to its intellectual heritage of transamerican and global perspectives.

Chapter 5, “Ana Castillo’s ‘distinct place in the Americas,’” examines two novels by Castillo, who was herself a movimiento activist in Chicago but whose writing challenges movimiento theorizations of history, identity, and narrative, as well as their critical descendents. Scholars have read Castillo as part of the queer, feminist critique of movimiento nationalism. That is indeed an undeniable aspect of Castillo’s work. However, in juxtaposing Sapogonia (1990), an early novel, with her more recent The Guardians (2007), this chapter aims to connect this critique to a long history of Chicana/o nationalist debate extending far back into the nineteenth century.

Sapogonia’s invocation of an imaginary, South American country rent asunder by civil war is a clear allegory of U.S. involvement in Central America, as well as a commentary on Latina/o political organizing in the United States in the 1980s. The abstract theorizations of identity, history, and art the novel puts forth are grounded in the material lives of the characters in The Guardians, a family drama about Mexican immigrants on the Texas-New Mexico-Mexico border in the early 2000s. The novels differ significantly in form and content—Sapogonia experiments with non-linear narrative and shifting focalization in its tale of worldtraveling artists and lovers, while The Guardians is a linear story about a family grappling with the geopolitical realities of a post-9/11 border—but both make similar claims about a capacious chicanismo and human connections forged through literature.

Castillo’s novels depict the new networks of affiliation engendered by cross-border flows of capital and people that rapidly accelerated after World War II. She situates them within a Chicana/o national community that looks very different from those of nineteenth-century Latino and Mexican travelers or the early twentieth-century Mexican American working and middle classes. Though their historical situations differ
greatly, each of the writers treated thus far takes up the similar task of constructing national narratives rooted not in rigid isolationism but in an international perspective. Castillo’s contribution is to recognize the connections between nativism and imperial capital, connections toward which the writers in the previous chapters could only gesture.

The four novels discussed in Chapter 6, “Border Patrol as Global Surveillance,” explore these connections through the figure of the Chicana/o detective. Detective fiction thematizes surveillance and paranoia, both of which emerge in this chapter as products of the War on Terror, represented in the novels in three domains: the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, technologies of surveillance, and discourses of international trade in people and commodities. The novels chart a progression through the shifting spaces of Chicana/o literature and provide a discursive map of its global engagement. Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s Desert Blood (2005) focuses on the rapidly changing environment of the U.S.-Mexico border. In this book, as in so many others, the border is amorphous, despite clearly demarcated points of entry between the two countries. Moreover, Ivon, the novel’s protagonist, is often disoriented in Mexican spaces, and the specific place she is trying to locate is, unbeknownst to her, mobile rather than fixed. Gaspar de Alba’s porous border is manifest, in Martín Limón’s The Door to Bitterness (2005), as the international resonance of U.S. concerns. Limón, like Gaspar de Alba, trades in global capital’s flexible shape, and his novel traces U.S. influence in postwar Korea, using Korea’s evolving racial identities, and their U.S. correlates, as indices of U.S. power.

Both Desert Blood and The Door to Bitterness comment on the culture of paranoia and surveillance that has emerged in the United States in the wake of 9/11, though neither novel mentions the War on Terror directly and The Door to Bitterness is set well before. Mario Acevedo’s The Nymphos of Rocky Flats (2006) and The Undead Kama Sutra (2008) take up the policies of the Bush administration directly, featuring Felix Gomez, a Chicano detective who was turned into a vampire while serving in the U.S. Army during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Acevedo’s novels, like Limón’s, depict race as a geopolitical product fashioned, in part, in response to U.S. force abroad. Acevedo, however, reigns in Limón’s international scope to focus more precisely on U.S. concerns, introducing the sublimely ridiculous—in the shapes of vampires, extraterrestrial beings, and sensual wood nymphs—into discussions of contemporary immigration policy and ethnic identities. Taken together these novels map a journey—from the U.S.-Mexico border to Korea and the exercise
of U.S. power abroad and finally to outer space—as the funhouse mirror to U.S. xenophobia and paranoia. This spatial progression charts an expanding arena for Chicana/o racial and ethnic identity, showing no one place as epicenter, arguing instead for a definition of *chicanismo* as a critical mode of engaging with U.S. power.

In many ways, the characters encountered in Chapter 6 do not differ much from the travelers of Chapter 1. They all try to make sense out of foreign spaces and grapple with their own foreignness. In many other ways, however, these travelers differ, most notably in how race conditions their perceptions of themselves and their relations to state power. All, however, understand the power, promise, and problems of the state: how it both protects and threatens, conditions identity while placing those identities in hierarchal relation to each other, includes and excludes. All are caught between the desire to either harness state power for themselves or transcend the state in search of more ethical, alternative social organizations.

This tension forms the core of the long history of national, hemispheric, and racial imaginaries in Chicana/o literature that *Chicano Nations* excavates. This is also an excavation of the idea that race lies at the heart of social organization and demonstrates that Chicana/o literature has always been actively engaged in undermining philosophies of race and nation through its gestures toward hemispheric alliance. These are the same alliances presented in Verdecchia’s Argentine Canadian plays. At the end of *The Adventures of Ali and Ali*, Ali Ababwa has a dream about Agraba but is confused because “the whole world was Agraba” (124). In the dream, dead friends and family are alive, children run through streets overgrown with grass and trees, all are employed, and “our words had grown taller than our swords” (125). He thinks it must have been some mystical vision of heaven. “No, Ali,” says Ali Hakim. “I think perhaps it was the future” (126).