

Borders Show Business: Performing States at the Margin  
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*Border Brujo*,<sup>1</sup> the first generation: In 1971, I was a graduate student at the University of Ghana, Legon, determined to spend my holidays in neighbouring Lomé, Togo, a cheerful *grand marché* of a coastal town where all sorts of goodies such as French wine and shaving cream, overtaxed or unavailable in Ghana, were on sale duty free. Obtaining a Togolese visa was both time-consuming and relatively costly, so I determined to make my way to Lomé and back via the sandy tracks inscribed across the border by smugglers. One night I set off on my motorcycle, breezing along the back road in the total darkness and thinking myself terribly clever. Then up ahead appeared a set of headlights dipping and weaving toward me over the uneven ground. Well, a fellow traveller should be no problem, but why was he so far over to the left? And so we approached straight on, until finally coming to a halt, face to face in each other's headlights. Balanced on my one-eyed Honda I could make out clearly the terrified and quizzical faces of two Togolese police officers. Well, I knew immediately I must be in Togo, not just from their uniforms, but from the instant realization that of course in Togo one drives on the right hand side of the road, not on the left as in Ghana in those days. Waving and bowing in both happy greeting and deep apology, I swung my cycle to the right and disappeared into the night. Of all my disingenuous performances at African international borders over the years, that was among the most transgressive and incompetent. Yet it illustrates the uses of astonishment and incredulity: if I should not, indeed could not have been there – being white, I would not be a smuggler or even have known of that road's existence – then I simply was *not* there, as anything more than a hallucination.

*Border Bruja*, the second generation: In 2010 my daughter Anna, aged 18, decided that a three-month spell of travel and work in Brazil would be the highlight of her 'gap year' between high school and university. All arrangements complete, she arrived at Sao Paulo only to be turned away because, as officials complained, she had not enough money in her pocket. Having done their prescribed duty, they proceeded to forget her presence entirely: there was apparently, no official next step. Sitting crestfallen in a moulded plastic chair in the arrivals hall, Anna noticed that Brazilian citizens, having passed through their own queue, were simply walking through an unattended glass door into the domestic flights section of the airport. Joining this entitled category, she proceeded to the domestic ticket counters, where she bought a ticket to Rio de Janeiro and flew with a bunch of happy Cariocas to the fabled city, where she arrived safe and happy at her backpackers and joined friends already in residence. Months later, on the way back to South Africa, no official at Sao Paulo either noted or cared that she had no stamp in her passport admitting her to Brazil in the first place. That's my girl (from Ipanema).

Over the years, many of my colleagues and I have experienced borders between African countries as a kind of hallucination in return, accompanied by astonishment and incredulity as well. Yes, there should be an official post: this concrete embodiment ought to be there to both mark and signify the border's actual existence. But then why, courtesy of the state at its attenuated margin, all the pomp and circumstance? The demand for unobtainable stamps, documents, and permits? The unpacking and repacking of bedraggled personal possessions and petty traders' sad array of (sometimes living) goods? The loose-cannon irritability of

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase, meaning Border 'shaman' or 'medicine man' in Spanish, is taken from Guillermo Gomez-Pena, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1993: 75-96

officials - sometimes even including strip searches and beatings – not of me or mine of course: in Africa it remains a privilege to be white. Surely this was gilding the uncultivated lily of state control. Unbelievers as we were, after bowing and scraping, we made snooty jokes at the officials' expense, once safely if sweatily out of earshot and on our way again. What we did not understand was the first theatrical rule of border management: that the panoply and ceremony of symbolic interaction and formality is in inverse proportion to the sense of security of the state and authorities in question. It is rather the same at University graduations, where the pomp and circumstance are in inverse proportion to the value of the degrees being awarded. Alternatively, in Africa, as elsewhere in the World-Formerly-Known-As-Third (thank you, Prince) the difficulty of officially negotiating a border is in surprisingly inverse proportion to the attractions offered by the country in question. In some cases, bribes may be demanded simply because officials or police assume that for reasons of your own, you have to cross the border, for if you had a choice you wouldn't be there. Overall, the less credible the state in question, the more performative effort is invested at its borders.

The performative dimension of bordering long precedes the formation of national states, or even multi-national empires. Early on, simply encountering the Other was evidence of a border enough. Indeed outsiders required special status and immunity simply to avoid violent attack, which is why in so many languages the word for 'hello' means 'peace'. Later, with territorial expansion, the effort to turn influence into power and power into control in the face of the distant absence of those who believed they were or should be *in* control became the foundation of bordering itself. One met the border when a settlement asserted loyalty to a different potentate or power than the settlement just behind. Non-literate, horseless polities such as the Zulu or the Inca were thus limited in both their ability to expand and control, and spent a good deal of time and effort attempting to terrorise subject peoples into voluntary, hegemonized submission. Elsewhere borders arose where or when one first encountered the troops and tax collectors of a different authority, or when rulers and their (often armed and dangerous) legatees arrived in your district. In medieval Europe, the kingdom existed wherever the king's person, property, decrees, or forces might be located at the time. In many cases the kingdom arrived in a subject town with the ruler and his entourage, and disappeared with the dust of their hooves when they left. In medieval Mali in the African Sahel, the Empire literally waxed and waned with the seasons, as the rains made travel by horseback impossible due to tse-tse fly, while the dry season was the time for imperial expeditions. On such royal *tours d'horizon* or confrontations with rebellious subjects or rival lords, the monarch and his retinue quite physically embodied and performed the state and its claims to authority, which we see now most prominently displayed at border posts. The border was then but a travelling, often rapacious, circus or theatrical event. This was very much the case with the largest land empire – not perhaps strictly speaking a state – ever to exist, that of Genghis and Timur Khan, which used the theater of genocidal terror to enforce a *pax mongolica* to enforce allegiance when there simply weren't enough Mongols to enforce it by any other means. Genghis Khan's grandson, Zahiruddin Mohammad Babur (1483-1530), the first emperor of what became the more secure Mughal dynasty in Afghanistan and India, expressed his suzerainty rather more effectively with Islamic *ghazal* poetry, a unique royal autobiography, the *Baburnama*, and unparalleled architectural magnificence (Ghosh, 2002: 90-108).

The reality and by extension the contestation of territorial borders was formalised with the emergence of the European monarchical nation state, at least as a sovereign political imaginary, at the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Of course, on the ground and in subsequent treaties the Westphalian principles of territorial integrity and exclusive sovereignty over

internal affairs were subject to the enactments in the theatre of war. 'Nation' conceived in the sense of *ethnos* had nothing necessarily to do with state boundaries but rather with imperial adventurism. Regrettably, such adventurism remains codified in international law as 'right of conquest'. Today, the ability to bring disparate 'peoples' and localised regimes together under the banner of empire (the 'Hapsburgian' model) remains, if only wistfully, somewhere at the heart of the notion of 'closer union' that motivates the European Union (Spener and Staudt 1998). But to begin at the beginning, we can view the process of 'nation' building as proceeding from the installation of mythic, then legendary events, deities, ancestors (often overlapping), and ritual representations and performances. Nothing less than divine authority seemed adequate to achieve the parallel objectives of territorializing and hegemonizing of history through the erasure of internal frontiers and the establishment of external ones (Zúñiga 35). Borders became key to this process because the meanings and forms of belonging arise from and depend on a socialized political-geographic space, and must reference traditions of narrative that are nameable and memorable (Raymond Williams, in Zúñiga, 44). Like divine authority itself, bordering is never complete, and border demarcation has proven exasperatingly impermanent. All that one can be sure of is that it always requires a performative maintenance of markers of 'them' as distinct from 'us.'

Fast-forward to the twenty-first century and nationality has been multiplied and de-territorialised. Nationalism and its fictions are nearing bankruptcy, as they cannot maintain economic sovereignty, or erase or assimilate local or immigrant identities. The United Nations Organisation, a simulacrum of world order based on performative 'national' states,<sup>2</sup> sends 'peacekeepers' who intervene clumsily around the world, attempting to enforce peace only where opposing interests seem not to want any, and state sovereignty where it is irretrievably absent. Internal borders are being reborn while international capital runs roughshod over external ones, and national politics has become a melodramatic sideshow (Zúñiga 46-51). "...now the border stands at the center and offers us a front row view of History's drama unfolding" Staudt and Spener. 88. This is why, rather too eagerly, cosmopolitan scholars write of processes of "debordering." As Albert and Brock state, "Under the pressure of debordering processes within the world of states, territorial determinants of social life and the political process are beginning to break down" 217. This process is reflected in a growing literature on non-state brokers as the pivotal actors in many borderlands, where one finds "the institutionalization of 'governance without government'" (Rosenau 1992) or the creation of "multilevel systems of governance consisting of trans-governmental and trans-state networks that link parts of governments and substate actors across borders 216." Yet, as Albert and Brock are quick to point out, in response states initiate countervailing (and largely unavailing) appeals to economic nationalism and the performance of borders, including re-bordering by coercive means 227. Indeed re-bordering cannot help but engage with the multidimensionality of borders in contestation 236-7. As for subjects themselves, in the contemporary world, individual identity is increasingly self-constructed from multiple sources and references of belonging (Jean-Pierre Saez 1995:25). The role of the state is to mediate these identities, managing and tolerating (or, cynically, demonizing) diversity. 50-51 Claims to status through such identities are legitimated through stories, the passionate senses of self that are forged, recreated and contested therein (Price 2004:28).

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<sup>2</sup> Since so few of its member states are by any definition 'nations', perhaps the United Nations Organization ought to be renamed the 'United States Organization.' Hmmm.

The nationalistic European wars of the nineteenth century, culminating in the First World War, both destroyed its imperial states and starkly outlined the need to enshrine Westphalian principles in secure agreements and even international organisations – The League of Nations. Versailles brought to the fore a newly influential American insistence on the legitimacy of a third principle discussed at Westphalia, the “self-determination of nations”. Nation here was conceived as some sort of self-identified ethnos, with a common language, history, and cultural values, contained within naturalised territorial borders. In a macabre festival of unanticipated consequences, this notion caused far more conflict than it resolved, with Ireland, South Asia, Indochina, and even colonial Africa inquiring audibly as to when their turns would come. Nazi Germany’s attempt to totally reverse the entire process finally demonstrated to Europeans the futility of imperial nationalism, leading to the effective disappearance of extra-continental empire as well. But the bordering process resumed with a vengeance, a result of a new ideologically –based imperial conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the need to invent and legitimise boundaries for newly independent post-colonial states.

And so the Broadway show of state sovereignty was duly sent on tour from the Great White Way of distant capitals to the tryouts of provincial state margins. In the case of the hyperbolically-named German Democratic Republic, the new borders were based on the fortification of a foreign military occupation zone. Now demarcating a line of confrontation between hostile superpower alliances, the border in the midst of Germany was indeed a serious business, and it may strike many as fatuous to emphasise its theatricality. It may be no coincidence, however, that among the most penetrating portrayals of life in twilight GDR is the 2006 Academy award-winning film, *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*) Directed by [Florian Henckel-Donnersmarck](#), in which the protagonist is a playwright and theatrical director. 110 kilometres inside the GDR of course was Berlin, a microcosm and micro-focus of the Cold War, with its NATO enclave providing the tyrannised and abstemious East with a sparkling beacon of Western capitalism. Obliging, East German Communist Party Secretary Walter Ulbricht built the famous 203 meter tower in the Alexanderplatz (now the state TV tower), dubbed St. Walter’s Tower by East Berliners, so they could enjoy a bird’s eye view of the enticing glitter of the West. More significant perhaps, even the part of the border secured by the infamous wall, with its pitiless *volpos*<sup>3</sup>, victims crucified on barbed wire, and Checkpoint Charlie was under certain circumstances crossable, negotiable. It depended not only on who you were or pretended to be, and on what your ostensible or real mission was, but also on how you behaved; how you performed. I will return to this point later.

It has become clear from the contributions of many scholars that borders and border posts, whether on land, in territorial waters, or at airports, are sites for the display and performance of state sovereignty. It is there at its territorial and cognitive margins that residents may be as much suspected of undermining this sovereignty as are foreigners only crossing over. Where indeed then is such performance more required, or more opportunistically enacted, with flags, uniforms, forms, documents, interrogations, even guns and gunboats, bugles, loudhailers and marching feet than at these official doorways to and from the outside world? Approaching a border post, one is left in no doubt one is beseeching entry to some other domain. And so too does the seemingly peremptory arbitrariness of some border officials play a part in the demonstration. No matter how complete and valid one’s documentation, or well-meaning

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<sup>3</sup> East German border police. Walking in Manhattan not long after the fall of the Berlin Wall, I encountered a clothing stall with a hat rack, and among the items on sale was an unmistakable light blue four-muff *volpo* winter hat. ‘Don’t you know the very sight of these struck terror into the hearts of East Berliners?’ I admonished the vendor. ‘Well’, he said in a thick Russian accent, ‘times change’.

one's mission, running the gauntlet of the border, first out of one zone of control, then into another, brings sweat to the palms, palpitations to the heart, awkwardness to the encounter. Indeed, at some borders in less developed countries, marginal traders who cannot afford inflated customs duties or significant payoffs to officials are abused, degraded, partly despoiled, and beaten.<sup>4</sup> This is not for their putative 'crimes', since border police know such trading is their only means of livelihood and are often personally familiar with them. It is to demonstrate an immediacy of power and extract a show of subservience that will serve as an object lesson to those who might plan to challenge the state's (uncertain) capacity for control, not by chance at the very point of entry.

The point is not to retail such extreme examples, but to emphasize the need to review types of performance at borders, whether on the part of officials or travellers. These include the manipulation or simply the display of ethnicity and citizenship: strategies, not only for deceiving border control, but also for enacting attitudes that border officials wish to see, and to approve as legitimation and recognition of their powers. Like the state, border operations are enacted by people; each of whom has not simply their own instructions (often contradictory or inoperable) but also self-interests that may vary widely from official regulations promulgated in the capital.

To return to the point about dyadic interplay (between border official and traveller) above, imagine this case: A young Iranian woman flees the crackdown that follows the election of hardline conservative **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** as President in 2005. Child of an active political family, she drifts through several countries, never safe or secure, without rest, trying to settle in the West. Along the way, she is assisted by small groups of activists, using forged or fake documents of varying quality, with varying success. Finally, she receives an invitation to Sweden from a local women's support group. She must rely upon some stranger's old and tattered but nationally appropriate passport, less likely to impress than others she has sported. At Stockholm airport she is questioned by a blonde giant of an immigration officer, who frowns at her passport, looks her in the face, stamps her passport, and lets her go. Today, after many 'negotiations', she is a Swedish citizen. What happened here? The Swedish official, while not impressed by her passport, or perhaps even by her 'story', looks at her weary, diminutive figure and slumping shoulders, senses the attitude of reserved supplication, notes her gaze of hopeful resignation: a *gemein* refugee. His job is to apply a legal regime, but in its performance, his power encompasses mercy. On the woman's side her performance, with its pathetic passport 'prop' and lack of artifice, has succeeded where deception would not. In all such border vignettes, performance plays some, sometimes even a crucial, part.

The importance of understanding the identity performances that instantiate both regimes and strategies of border crossing led in the nineteen eighties to a dramatic shift in the attention of border studies away from politics, law, international relations, and the regulation of trade. The opposing, experiential concepts of the border led to more fluid, constructivist notions of borders as sites of social interaction where outcomes were more a product of the deployment of rhetorics of identity and personal agency than of regulatory regimes. The rules, it appeared, were made not so much to be broken as to serve as a framework for creative play. Writer and literary philosopher of *mestizaje*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and border

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<sup>4</sup>Jørgen Carling, Migration Control and Migrant Fatalities at the Spanish-African Borders. *International Migration Review*, Volume 41, Issue 2, pages 316–343, June 2007

performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña have so described the Mexico-US border in metaphorical terms. It is a landscape where the ebb and flow of social and economic interpenetration is informed by mythic ceremonies of purity and danger, post-structuralist notions of hybridity, states of border crossing, the 'third country' of borderlands, multiply emergent, ambiguous cultural and linguistic zones, and the existential deployment of fragmented identities. Mex-American governments, both local and national, join in by sponsoring grotesque, over-baked monuments to mark their border crossing points, including outsize flags, statues of national heroes, bronzed maps, pre-Columbian caricatures, streets named for heroes of the Mexican revolution (1910), and – on both sides – MacDonalads' restaurants (Price 2004: 107). Indeed it is Gomez-Peña who has most consistently over many years turned 'his' border and borderland (US-California) into a performance space. In Gomez-Peña's writings (2000, 1996, 1993) plays, demonstrations, museum exhibitions, lectures, performance art, and endlessly transformative 'blurred genres,' he and his collaborators have satirically but ruthlessly interrogated every identity representation and paranoid myth or fantasy that 'Anglos,' 'Mexicanos/as,' and 'Chicanos/as' cherish about one another. In that sense Gomez-Peña has invented an art of border performance that transgresses and translocates borders of every kind, from the political and economic to the cultural, cognitive, and nightmarishly psychological.

But opposing any 'mentalist' conception of borders as sites of serious play are social scientists such as such as Pablo Vila (2000, 2003) who have described the constructions of actual border identities among people living on the Texas/Mexico Border. Vila describes the ways in which border people view their identities in relation to groups they come to define as 'others', often setting boundaries among Anglos, Mexicans, and African Americans living on the border. What is most significant about Vila's research is that he came to understand the US–Mexico region as one that consisted of several borders, which cannot be explained simply as an outcome of hybridization. He argues that 'each (border region) is the locus of very different processes of internal and international migration, ethnic composition, and political identities on both sides'. Lugo (2000: 356) makes the obvious distinction between the border as a metaphor and imposed concrete borders: The concepts of 'borderlands', 'border crossings', and 'the border' are after all hardly synonymous. There is a difference between borderlands and border crossings conceived as a kind of interior landscape of identity and as mandated and sanctioned by nation-state policy makers and officials. International borders are actively enforced by an immigration or customs officer, border patrol agent or policeman, in uniform and 'with a pistol in his hand.' (Paredes 1986). Borderlands studies as post-structuralist theory can mean dwelling in ever-decentered metaphorical borderlands while losing touch with located communities and the place-specific concerns of real people. De-personalized theory must not 'de-territorialise' specific borderlands. The border is more than metaphor, it is a political economy with real material conditions (Price 2004: 109 -110). Identity is performative, socially constructed, and contingent. Yet this understanding is tempered by the realization that the ability of subjects to resist, subvert, or redefine dominant paradigms and institutions is always historically situated and enmeshed in webs of power. For historically marginalized subjects, political agency is always simultaneously unlimited and partial ( Beltran 2004: 603).

While delinking culture from geography, as culture becomes de-territorialised in global flows, post-structuralist border studies still must have a territorial focus (Spener and Staudt 1998: 16). As Samuel Truett, puts it, we need "to track historical border crossers along their own, local pathways. For only then can we appreciate how ordinary people emerged from the shadows of state and corporate control to reshape the borderlands on their own terms" Truett

2006: 9). Seeking to slip past what Gomez-Peña (2000:12) calls “The border guards of identity,” border-crossers with reason to worry are often well versed in the suppression of significations of their ‘actual’ (!) identity and the performance of one more acceptable on the spot. So, despite the suspicion and exclusionary measures directed at Mexican nationals at US border stations, migrants from Central America, who are even more subject to such suspicions and measures, frequently negotiate and contest the border by enacting Mexican identities, familiarizing themselves with the social geographies of Mexican towns and cities Ruiz 2006: 46).

As Walters (2006: 187) has suggested, “Border control is like antivirus software, not just because it aspires to filter and secure its interior, but also because its fate is to toil in the shadow of the restless hacker.” No matter how intimidating border fortifications and controls, and no matter how consistent and rigid the regulations are supposed to be, border-post formalities are still an encounter between persons. Precisely because officials need to reinforce their own *personal* authority among supplicants, they make representations and decisions in a contextual setting where anything from all things to hardly any things are considered. What gets considered is often a function of the enactment, effective or not, of scripts and routines that satisfy narrative expectations and categories of the interlocutors performing these representations of authority and control. We might even go as far as Aretxaga, who asserts that “rational technologies of control [are necessarily] animated by a substrate of fantasy scenes” (2003: 402–403). And as Chalfin writes in reference to customs officials at Accra’s Kotoka International Airport:

...the systems and symbols of authority that constitute sovereign statehood are as much structures of feeling as they are structures of force: congeries of affect as much as of action. Indeed, in states such as Ghana, given the confluence of multiple and fluid regulatory registers occurring in official spaces of mobility as a result of neoliberalism’s unbridled advance, affective exchange emerges as a primary means of expressing and experiencing sovereign authority. ...These interactions and accompanying imaginaries, hence, represent a domain in which the tenuous yet ever-powerful boundary between state and society is objectified (cf. Mitchell 1991)...in spaces of transit and transition such as Kotoka International Airport, beset by incompatibilities and ever-shifting agendas, subjective states—narratives, identifications, moral judgments, fantasies, and fears—offer an unparalleled archive of the multiplex registers of sovereign authority and transformation for state agents and subjects alike.532-533

Such examples show that all borders (even massively geographical ones) are a ‘construction’. The construction of boundaries at all scales and dimensions takes place through narrativity (Newman and Paasib 1998: 195). The boundaries of the national imagined communities and the narratives that constitute their collective cultural discourses are also changing continually (Bhabha 1990). The construction of identity narratives is itself political action and is part of the distribution of social power in society (Somers, 1994; Newman and Passib 1998:195). These boundary-related narratives also constitute contested frontiers, inasmuch as they exist by virtue of the boundary. Within these frontiers, the contest for identity socialization takes place, as institutions and agencies attempt to create exclusive ‘us’ identities and, by definition, outsider images of the ‘Other’ (Paasi, 1996a). Local experience and folklore mediate the national forms of identity, and it is impossible to understand the latter without knowledge of the former (Cohen, 1982; Paasi, 1996a). The iconic characters of one border may even reappear as a kind of leitmotif on another, so that Texas Rangers, Mexicans, Native Americans, and the US Cavalry can be readily, even uncannily substituted by the Boer settler commandos, African Basotho, Khoi-San, and British colonial troops of South Africa/ Basutoland (Coplan 2000, 2001): the classic “western” transformed into a “southern.”

The implication of these realizations is that borders are as variable as the stories through which they are constructed, and we have to know not only the stories, but also who the story tellers are, and what their common experiences have been. Borders are made as part of a process of telling and retelling stories from which identities emerge. As times and places change, narrative plausibility varies in relation to such identities (Eder 2006: 257). So, there is something behind cognitive identity claims that determines their force (or weakness), their plausibility or their implausibility. Put another way, drawing a boundary is embedded in a series of communicative acts which involve the circulation of stories. Thus we have to analyse stories and the social relations that are constituted by shared stories in order to make sense of the embeddedness of cognitive projects of constructing boundaries and collective identities. The type of social relation varies with the type of the story told; in any case they produce boundaries, define the borders of a communicative space of shared stories. Boundaries emerge in social interaction in which people constantly check whether they share stories to be told about the world they live in (Eder 2006: 257-8). The social distance between different or opposed groups across a border or within a borderland can be measured or at least portrayed effectively through a comparison of their divergent, convergent, or parallel narrations of the borderland and its history (Coplan 2000).

An extension or rather a socialization of such bordering narratives is found in media spectacles dwelling on the xenophobia and/or xenophilia created around immigration, spectacles central to the dramatization of questions of exclusion and inclusion in 'national' (putatively autochthonous) communities (Vukov 2003: 336). The affect generated around immigration in media culture plays a critical and mobilizing role in articulating the popular frames that shape the formation of immigration policy, whether through mediated panics or celebratory portraits of desirable immigrants. So, just to use the United States as a self-contradicting example, The mythic status of Ellis Island as a gateway to the American Dream (when so many of the descendants of those who arrived there are now the unemployed denizens of the industrial rustbelt) contrasts with the draconian racial anti-Asian immigration laws of 1924. Or even earlier, with the deportation of so many US Chinese immigrants to Mexico from 1916. In Los Angeles, the 1943 *pachuco* or *zoot-suit* riots brought conservative, war-anxious US servicemen into violent conflict with the flamboyant, over-dressed *boulevardiers* of Mexican-American youth gangs. It was not so much anything the young *chicanos* did as how they theatrically represented their own styles of popular culture in defiance of Anglo-American wartime mores and strictures that brought violent public attacks from the soldiers.

Yet the United States is in some wise a 'nation of immigrants' as advertised, and can claim to have assimilated new arrivals from almost everywhere far more effectively and peacefully than has any member of the European Union. That victims hailing from 56 countries, including quite a few Muslims, were killed in the September 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Centre attests to this claim. The ongoing irruption of media spectacles around migration speaks to the ways in which immigration evokes strong political affect around commonsense imaginings of national belonging, of who should be included and excluded in the national community. The affective amplification that news media discourses engage in (what Hall et al. [1978] call the 'amplification spiral') plays a crucial role in articulating immigration, criminality and fear together by means of affective resonance (Vukov 2003: 340). Yet as Gomez-Pena reminds us, journalists rarely realise that what they are doing is performance (2000:194).



Nor are journalists the only public interlocutors who retail performances focusing on issues of borders and border crossers. Politicians seeking to overcome their own obscurity or unpopularity (and cynically aware in some cases of Samuel Johnson's adage: "patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel") often turn to attacks against immigrants or transnational residents as a way of garnering support. Western Europe, of course, currently produces more than its share of such political campaigns and campaigners. To cite but one example perhaps less known than those of Fortuin and Wilders of Holland or Sarkozy of France, there is that of Roland Koch of Germany. Koch was barely elected Minister President of Hesse in 1999 based on his opposition to Federal plans to make dual citizenship easier for foreigners to obtain and citizens to hold. Koch's mobilization of anti-cosmopolitan as well as anti-foreign popular sentiment kept him in power until August 2010, when he suddenly resigned. Performing German identity in this old way was not, as Koch claimed, some sort of loyalty test, but an attack on trans-nationalism on a more global plane, as Koch himself well understood. Its effect was not simply to make it more difficult for German nationals to do business internationally. Those who thought the campaign might somehow deter immigration were also deceived, for it meant that many of those who had come to Germany with the idea of remaining only temporarily for purposes of employment would hang on indefinitely, rather than risk losing access to the German economy by visiting their countries of birth. Such campaigns point to the most powerful contradiction of border politics globally, which is the frantic and unrelenting attempts by increasingly insecure national states to reinforce their borders and re-border themselves in response to global flows of just about everyone and everything that threaten to de-border them at every turn. Even the European Union's Schengen Treaty that in practice abolishes border controls within its compass (excluding member Great Britain but including non-member Switzerland!) is also an attempt to make it far more difficult for travellers from outside the EU to enter any of its member states.

Of course neither the European Union nor the United States can be held entirely at fault for what cosmopolitans regard as an immensely damaging but still rear-guard reinforcement of border restrictions. International terrorism and transnational crime syndicates have made common-cause with reactionary Euro-American politics in providing credible justifications for performing state borders with draconian defensiveness. Against such justifications, which have their own domestic political utilities, the 'reasonable', internationalist and even economic arguments of more liberal commentators and political figures have diminishing effect. Turning this whole equation upside down (inside out?) is the phenomenon of Wikileaks, whose founder Julian Assange has gone to such lengths to obstruct the performance art called international diplomacy, particularly by the United States. In a bizarre display of megalomania, Assange has been quoted as arguing that far from promoting greater transparency in international relations, the diplomatic insularity that would be forced on the United States by the Wikileaks revelations would make global intelligence coordination more difficult, so helping to 'bring the empire down.' Even those who would that this were so cannot rationally credit such self-promotional misrepresentation. Putting it aside that so few of the Wikileaks revelations so far have proved either properly damaging, surprising, or even new (Russia is a mafia state? The US armed forces were little concerned about civilian casualties in Iraq? Who knew?), the whole quixotic enterprise begs the question as to just what the role of professional, 'station' diplomats is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cyber communications and supernumerary 'special envoys' would seem to have obviated this role and, far from effecting policy or international negotiations or agreements, professional diplomats appear to have been reduced to the performance of cocktail party espionage. The paranoid response of the United States Department of State to Wikileaks appears more a face-saving exercise dealing with an embarrassing breach of cyber security. But Wikileaks had not

even the capability or initiative to hack into State Department computers: the leaked communications were supplied by a minor American foreign based employee of the Department itself. Most recently, big Capital has itself found a use for Wikileaks, as the Swiss banking regulator handed over the names of foreign tax evaders hiding their funds in numbered Swiss bank accounts to the ‘crusading’ website in order to avoid local legal complications.

Perhaps the most exciting and even potentially subversive arena of border performance is border performance art itself. On the adversarial side stands the work of Mexicano/Chicano Guillermo Gomez-Peña and his merry band of artistes, whose extraordinary literary works, performances and public installations are described and analysed in such works as *Dangerous Border Crossers: the Artist Talks Back* (Gomez-Peña, 2000), *The New World Border* (Gomez-Peña 1996), and *Warrior for Gringostroika* (Gomez-Peña 1993). Gomez-Peña, originally from Mexico City, has spent his adult life principally in Los Angeles and other North American and world cities, providing his mobile cultural perspectives with the dilemmas of being taken as Mexican in the United States, Chicano in Mexico, and threatening to ingrained ideas of identity, nationality, and political attitude wherever he lives, travels, and performs. His first performance was a “Spanglish” poetry reading in a public bathroom at the California School of the Arts in 1979: “I sat on a toilet and read aloud epic poetry describing my journey to the United States. Whoever happened to come into the bathroom – for whatever reason – experienced the piece.”



Guillermo Gómez-Peña's latest project, *El Mexterminator* (in collaboration with Roberto Sifuentes) is not a single text, event, or performance. In its New York incarnation, it consisted of a month-long series of actions, appearances, performances, and interventions that ranged across the geographical and virtual spaces of the city. Adopting "ethno-cyborg" personas, collaborators Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes participated in a live Internet chat and a radio call-in show. Potential audiences were also invited to visit and contribute to the *El*

Mexterminator "Temple of Confessions," an interactive web site. Together with Sara Shelton Mann, they roved the city's public spaces on several occasions in their roles as "El Mexterminator" (Gómez-Peña), "Cyber-Vato" (Sifuentes) and "La Cultural Transvestite" (Shelton Mann). Finally, anchoring these various events was the installation at El Museo del Barrio titled "Techno-Museo de Etnografía Interactiva," featuring the performers as "live Mexicans on display."

The images, characters, narratives and actions that make up El Mexterminator animate and recirculate myths, cultural beliefs, and stereotypes about Chicano and Latino culture, the U.S.-Mexico border, immigration, and the relation of art to politics. For over two decades, Gómez-Peña has been working both alone and in collaboration with various artists to produce performance pieces that share many elements with the current one. For example, the complex and hybridized personas of El Mexterminator recall the 1989 performance piece *Border Brujo*, described by Gómez-Peña as "a ritual, linguistic, and performative journey across the United States/México border." In 1992, Gómez-Peña appeared with Coco Fusco at the Whitney Museum and other major museums around the country as "Two Undiscovered Amerindians," "primitives" from the fictional island of Guatinai. As in El Mexterminator, the audience was positioned as the source of the anthropological gaze: audiences visiting the "Amerindians" were invited to ask for an "authentic dance," a "story in Guatinai," or a souvenir photo. In recognition of the significance of this body of work, Gómez-Peña has been awarded a MacArthur Fellowship as well as a National Book Award for *The New World Border* (City Lights, 1996), a collection of performance texts, essays, and poetry. In these projects and performances, the Mexico-United States border is the specific and explicit site of criticism and interrogation. At the same time, the conflicts, contradictions, and complexities of the geographical border zone become metaphoric materials through which to explore cultural, political, sexual, artistic, and intellectual borders as well. For Gómez-Peña, who is not only a performer and artist but also a poet and theorist of cultural borderlands and multicultures, the artist must be redefined: "not just an imagemaker or a marginal genius, but a social thinker/ educator/ counterjournalist/ civilian diplomat/ human-rights observer." Gómez-Peña views himself as a "border artist" for whom experimental techniques and performance-derived practices become a means to intervene in, and impact on, the emergence of new cultural formations. The aim, as Gómez-Peña puts it, is "a project of redefinition, which conceives of the border not only as the limits of the two countries, but as a cardinal intersection of many realities. In this sense, the border is not an abyss that will have to save us from threatening otherness, but a place where the so-called otherness yields, becomes us, and therefore becomes comprehensible.

Like all of Gómez-Peña's work, El Mexterminator probes the politicized spaces of difference and desire. In this sense, it might be viewed as another salvo in the ongoing "culture wars." Indeed, what is most immediately evident in El Mexterminator is the way in which its thematic or theoretical concerns--ideas of hybridity and the border zone, of the cultural construction of the "other," of the body of the other as a site of projection for both desires and fears--echo and amplify issues that have been reflected in a range of "multicultural" and

"postcolonial" thought and practice over the past decade... (Samira, 1999: 46-52).



Guillermo Gomez-Pena as *El Mexterminator*

### **Conclusion:**

In the course of this narrative we have learned that the fraught encounters between travellers and border officials are more often than supposed a matter of prestidigitation. In this dialogic magic show, with its illusions created through signs, symbols and portents, it is often unclear who is fooling who; who is the magician and who the (sometimes willing, even knowing) 'dupe'. "Hey presto!" and the traveller, the border guardian, even the border itself may disappear, only to reappear on the far side or at the next crossing. No border, not even the Warsaw Pact borders of yesteryear or the United States/Mexico border of today, can be policed with even modest success unless the majority of would-be border crossers 'police themselves' by playing along voluntarily, at least most of the time, with the legal regime of control imposed by at least one bordering state and its agents. Securing such cooperation or at least pressing travellers who have not or cannot meet the necessary legal requirements for entry to at the very least go to inordinate lengths to circumvent them is to an important extent a matter of embedded performance. Performance by state agents must instil in border crossers discipline, respect, fear, and a willingness to both recognize state sovereignty and submit to its projections of power at its territorial margins. In this elaborate field of play, it is often citizens of the very states whose territories comprise the border who have the most cynicism and the least trepidation with regard to state regulation and alternative strategies of cross-border movement.

Of course, border performance is more than a matter of enactments involving travellers, state officials, and other no less important mediators, 'service' providers, and assorted hangers-on. It is also a theatre in which neighbouring states represent and play out, often enough in hyper-dramatic fashion, their bilateral relations. Today, there is surely no more performative border in the world than that between Amritsar in India and Lahore in Pakistan, the Redclief Line at Wagha. The ceremony that is staged every evening at the closing of the gate for the night compresses in a short and not uncordial few minutes not only the most militant panoply of sovereign statehood, but the bitterness, anger, and sorrow that is the inevitable residue of war between brothers. Meantime the hundreds of people who unfailingly gather to watch the ceremony each evening constitute themselves into an "audience," seated on bleachers provided for their convenience by the authorities. And not merely an audience: this being India/Pakistan, a general atmosphere of festival prevails, as singing, dancing, eating and hawking always enliven the proceedings. The border guards too dance in military style, expressing with hard-stamping precision the snarling animosity that characterises Indian-Pakistan official relations. Formerly, there was no better example of border performance than

that of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany at the Berlin Wall, with its shoot-to-kill border police, growling, barely restrained Doberman pinchers, barbed wire filigree, and no-man's land on the East, and multi-national uniforms and grimly colorful graffiti decorating 'Checkpoint Charlie' on the West. Some will observe that there was real *force majeure* and not just its representation involved in the East Germans' display on the Unter den Linden. That point taken, an impressive enactment of ruthless aggression was certainly a primary product of such a border regime. Not so the script through which the border was, as in a magic show, made to disappear. The Deputy Prime Minister of the GDR simply announced on radio that henceforward, the *volpos* (border police), would be withdrawn from duty at the Wall. Incredulous, those on both sides who understood this coded statement, not just in Berlin but throughout the two Germanies, rushed to the Wall and, in a joyous festival of destruction, smashed it down. So then too is the unmaking of borders a performative engagement with our desire to remove everything that obstructs human consciousness and aspiration. Increasingly in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, citizens are coming to understand that it is not they who are being reassured and protected by the theatre of borders.

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