Painted Over in Brown: Border Art as Visual Discourse of Resistance

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“Painted Over in Brown: Border Art as Visual Discourse of Resistance”

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B.S. Business Administration: Marketing, University of Northern Colorado, 2018

THESIS
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all those who have lost their lives crossing borders, physically, spiritually, and metaphorically. I hope that we strive to bring recognition to the power of images and what they communicate and let us take back a tool used to dehumanize us in order to shine light on the injustices in this world.

I dedicate this to the many brown and black bodies who have witnessed trauma time and time again, so much that our trauma is more normalized than our success. To my countless brothers and sisters and their children who have been deported, restricted, or on a two-year DACA contract. I dedicate this body of work to my abuela who witnessed the loss of babies, the realities of drug addictions, incarcerations, deportations, but never physically witnessed her nieta cross the stage of a university graduation ceremony, to my abuelito who gave me words to finish my master’s degree, even during his last days. This is for mi gente, for the first generations, the sisters and brothers who stand in solidarity, to my parents, to my family, to a future without borders, and to the artist who paint till we are seen. Thank you to Ana, ERRE, and Margarita for letting me analyze their work, and continuing email conversations, all while in a pandemic. I hope I did you all justice.

“You might take our land, but you will not take our art, our ideas, our thoughts”

-Dr. Jaelyn deMaría.
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While I did this degree for myself, I had a greater community who made sure I did not have to do it alone. Therefore, I want to thank my committee members, Dr. Theresa Cordova, Dr. Judith White, and of course my chair, advisor, and friend Dr. Jaelyn deMaría. If someone told me I would have become a gardener while attending UNM I would have been so confused, but I did. Dr. deMaría, both physically and emotionally planted and uprooted with me, giving space for all life’s seasons including loss. Dr. deMaría, constantly instilled in me that my brown body holds space in academia, and that I can complete this degree. You did so by reminding me where I came from and for whom we do this work for (*nuestra gente*) but most importantly you allowed me to be human in this process, allowed me to break down, cry, and reminded me to pick myself up again. For that I will be forever grateful.

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Abstract

Borders are created to colonize both land and body. The politically constructed line between the United Stated (U.S.) and Mexico impose physical and emotional trauma through border militarization and immigration policies that consequently separate families and criminalize individuals. Rhetoric centering xenophobic divisions has normalized violence against brown bodies. The relentless effort to continue this divide has led to a genre of art that manifests on the border wall. Artist use the U.S.-Mexico border as a canvas to resist and challenge migratory criminalization by visualizing their opinions to redefine this 1,954-mile line. This research is centered in the study of communication through a borderlands lens and pulls from Gillian Roses’ (2001) method for visual analysis. In a five-part phase, I examine the work of three political art activists who rework the aesthetics of the border wall with their art and use of digital photography
as a way to communicate that revision to the masses. Specifically, I examined art that
was directly created on the U.S.-Mexico border, which creates a facade of the border
wall by (1) visually connecting the two physical spaces and (2) giving an illusion of
eliminating the border completely.

Key Words: Borderlands, political art, visual discourse, photography
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Color Brown

Anger is the revolution of salvation of humanity
that is sparked by the warmth of yellow
That becomes so tired of the bullshit it turns it a red blazing fire
That weeps for the restoration of humanity

That is painted over in Brown
A color of anger that screams at humans along a border

Shots fired at my people screaming “illegal”
That smears into the color red
Not just by those of the lives from El Paso but the ones deep in the soil

My sorrow
Mi gente
This is long lasting

I am tired of my color being associated with hate
Trying to humanize my existence
That is limited by a border that calls for DEPORTATION

How does a FUCKING LINE HAVE more agency than my body?

The sounds of children crying
Gun shots form an AK-47
The sounds of small hands on twitter that type
“I L E G A L”
This anger is brown yet its covered in red-white-and-blue
Brown might speak anger for some
But for me it sparks

REVOLUCIÒN

By brown body is a revelation.

-Nicole Rivera

(The poem above was written in reaction to the 2019 El Paso shooting. The El Paso Shooting was a terrorist attack on brown bodies living on the border in response to the relentless rhetoric of migrants during the Trump Administration).
Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) states that, “Borders have historically been spaces of colonization where powerful forces have imposed, represented, and misinterpreted historical truths” (p.11). She theorizes about La consciencia, which is the double consciousness that forms when living on the border. These borders go far beyond the physical and geographic location between the United States (U.S.) and Mexico. They also include the borders on which we subconsciously live by and/or on. Borders are psychological as much as they are physical; they are formed by hegemony, hetero normativity, and subjugation. Borders are spiritual, sexual, social, economic, and metaphorical; they are the restraints and limitations by which we are forced to live. However, there are those who become border crossers, and they hold the ability to live on the margins producing an “outsider within” knowledge, “by being within a system while also retaining the knowledge of an outsider who comes from outside, the system” (Anzaldúa, 1987 p.7). As a result, the Mestiza consciousness is developed and embraced. The Mestiza builds tolerance around ambiguous spaces, where nothing is abandoned or thrown out. Though, through painful emotional events, can move toward the third space through the Mestiza subconscious (Anzaldúa, 1987).

As a Latina growing up in the U.S. in the 1990’s, it was a rite of passage to watch the film Selena (1997) (inspired by the true story of the Tejano music queen herself). There is an iconic scene where Selena (played by Jenifer Lopez) and her brother are being lectured by their father (Abraham Quintanilla, as portrayed by Edward James Olmos) regarding the reality of being Mexican-American and the repercussions of visiting their homeland, Mexico. He stated, “We got to be more Mexican than the Mexicans, and more American than the Americans both at the same time; it’s exhausting!” (Quintanialla, Kartz, & Esparza, 1997, 0:59:41-0:59:047). While the work of Gloria Anzaldúa indicates that this is a form of an ideological borderland created by
a line between multiple identities, (i.e. the hyphen). Abraham expands this narrative by situating the geographic location of U.S. and Mexico expressing that the proximity of these two neighboring countries adds more weight for the everyday lived experiences of Mexican-Americans.

As I’ve grown up, my understanding of this scene deepens, and I believe it was the first time I was exposed to borderland ideology. Leading me to understand that, as a Mexican-American, I am the outsider within, because I navigate through a metaphorical border that strives to find the third space within my identity. Yet, when it comes to the physical location of the border and Mexico I have only ever felt like an outsider. There was a time when my father would go back and forth to el otro lado (the other side) and visit La Ciudad Juárez, the place where he was born. Sometimes my father visited Juárez with my grandparents and oldest sister but being one of the youngest siblings in my family, I have inherited a different reality regarding going to “the other side.”

This reality was formulated and influenced by the generational trauma felt within my family due to the lack of humanity experienced at the hands of a physical border. A border that only grants freedom with proper documentation. While these borders give a physical limitation, greater restrictions occur on the mind and quality of life are far greater. My cultural identity is wounded by the constraint of the border and the U.S. policies set in place to affect its neighboring countries, migrants, and the generations that follow. It does so at such a paralyzing extent that my experience with the physical border has only been lived through my interaction with Images. Images that, on one hand, center around a narrative that such a division is needed. On the other hand, images that contest these emotional and physical restraints through border art resistance also remain prevalent.
In 2011, Ana Teresa Fernández, opened up space for the broader public to look and engage with a transnational militarized space where many will not go themselves; a space created to separate and restrict all forms of life to uphold a narrative of national security. This thesis explores a form of art that confronts individuals in “forbidden/forgotten zones of the psyche” (Gómez-Peña, 2000, p.40). Through the use of digital photography, images of art are circulated on social media platforms and broadcast by traditional news outlets, luring individuals to look at a normalized division that held an untold reality. This artwork brought attention to this physical limitation by visually eliminating a piece of the Tijuana and San Diego border. Not only did art have the power to make individuals look at the border, it challenged them to question this human made division that separates natural resources, such as land and ocean. This has been done through painting a façade and allowing individuals to unsee the wall through various installations, which allowed these artists to add a visual layer to an ongoing narrative surrounding immigration policy within the U.S.

Artists utilize the U.S. and Mexico border as a canvas to resist the power structures set in place. The wall that is made to stand at the Southern border of the U.S. is a symbolic trope rooted in xenophobia and used to demonize and dehumanize the brown bodies that cross it. The book Across the line Al-otro-lado: The poetry of Baja California (Weiss, 2002) emphasizes border dwelling perceptions of the U.S.-Mexico border through a collection of poems written by Baja poets who give perspectives of living along the border. Raul Antonio Cota contributes a poem called “The Possible Myth” that speaks to the “enigmas of California” and the collective and contested myths created about the other side. Cota summons his ancestors and writes, “I believe in the California of Myth – the only one possible” (Cota in Weiss, 2002). Dante Salgado (in Weiss 2002) also writes about, “the angels and demons struggle” for el otro lado. He writes,
Who shall win the souls?
Who invented this island
of golden hills
and savage Amazons?

In the northernmost part of the country
Vengeance is prepared
Dawn is the cry of war
Someone will never awaken again
Someone will remain sunk in a dream

Edmundo Lizardi (In Weiss 2002) also writes a deeper reflection of the border in his poem “Baja Times.” His poetry descends the tourist paths to sites of revelry and bliss, while charting a countermovement in the Zapatistas rising from the far south of Mexico, the figure of rebellion that “hides in every half-fucked Mexican.” (Weiss, 2002, para. 5). Other poets write about internal and external conflicts of crossing for education and “better opportunities” felt upon returning home to resentments felt by those who were left behind. While discourse emphasizes the high rates of Mexicans trying to go to the U.S., plenty of individuals do not care to cross the line.

Nonetheless, resistance against migratory policies and geographical divisions have been evident throughout history. Deportations continue at a historic rate, in the past decade (Nowrasteh, 2019; Chishti, Pierce, & Bolter 2019). The U.S. government began recording the number of U.S. removals during the Benjamin Harrison’s presidency in 1892 and continues to do so in present day. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) (2019) indicated that the highest deportation rates and highest number of removals occurred during the Obama administration. The Obama administration was reportedly responsible for the removal and deportation of 3,066,457 individuals during 2009-2017 presidential terms. Currently, the Obama administration holds the highest removal in history, thus far (Chishti, Pierce, & Bolter 2019; Nowrasteh, 2019). These numbers contribute to the increase of border art within this timeframe.
The relentless effort to continue separation policies that divide using this arbitrary line continues to inspire artists to use the U.S.-Mexico border as a canvas for art to display resistance and humanize a space that has played a part in so many family separations and migrant deaths. Borders are created to colonize land, body, and mind. Many artists resist and challenge migratory criminalization by visualizing an alternative narrative and sharing it through various media outlets. Artists strive to redefine this 1,954-mile line and use it as a canvas to demonstrate their rage, hurt, and call for humanity. Moreover, the power of digital photography and social media allow artists to communicate their narrative and allow someone like me the visibility of the border, to emphasize the need for political change and humanitarian welfare. My research derives from the following question:

(RQ 1) What is communicated by creating a façade of invisibility through art on the United States (U.S.) and Mexico border?

**Terminology**

In the art world, invisibility, or facade, is a form of erasure (Roy & Ong, 2011) or a form of visual manipulation within the artwork being produced. Researchers and professional photographers (Ferdous, 2014; Gunkel 2015; Pedri-Spade, 2017) have highlighted the importance of photography in political platforms, activism, and human rights movements, though none have explicitly looked at the artwork or photographs of art that creates an illusion of invisibility on the U.S.-Mexico border. While some have engaged in conversations about border art, (Gaspar de Alba, 1998; Gómez-Peña, 1985; Sheren, 2015) the many have yet to include the new generation of artists and their work that originates from immigration policy in the time of digital media and social platforms within the past decade. I examine two images that demonstrate the U.S.-Mexico border as a canvas for artists to expand borders redefining space
and place in response to the historical violence and xenophobic rhetoric against brown bodies at the U.S.-Mexico border that has been rampant within this past decade. Furthermore, I will analyze the emplaced vernacular to understand what is being communicated through border art and how it represents a narrative of resistance where trauma has been historically evident.

The racial and ethnic make-up of bodies at the U.S.-Mexico border is also a façade. The multi-ethnic composition of immigrants goes far beyond Mexico. Therefore, it is critical to note that assigning labels such as Mexican, Latina/o or Hispanic does not accurately represent all individuals within the group to whom this name applies. Therefore, I use the term “transnational citizens” to include all border-crossing bodies. Within the book *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Bajalta California* (2003) Berelowitz, Leclerc, and Dear claim that while militarized borders such as the Berlin Wall, have existed throughout history, there lie some spaces where the border has evolved, such as Bajalta and Tijuana, to form a greater community. While Berelowitz, Leclerc, and Dear (2003) address the negative implications of the border, they also argue that transnational urban ecology can be overlooked stating, “we find community spaces that sprawl across international boundaries” (p.132). In essence, the authors claim globalized economy and globalization along the border has influenced transnational communities. The notion of moving back and forth to *el otro lado* has created the ability to live in both worlds, therefore reinforcing the ideology of facade.

Consumers constitute the most active group of legal border crossers, and are perhaps the primary population that ties together the two sides of the Mexico–U.S. trans frontier metropolis. Collectively they form a complex regional network of flows north and south across the border. The existence of this volume of flows is leading to the emergence of what we might term
“transnational citizens,” people who exist on both sides of the border (Berelowitz, Leclerc, & Dear, 2003, p.133).

Apart from ethnic identity, place-based identity (deMaría, 2012) also plays a key part. Transnational, place-based identities occupy space on the international border, influenced by constantly moving, unstable environments. While many scholars draw from the popular phrase “el otro lado,” or “the other side,” I use the description as inclusive of border art community and to redefine boundaries. Thus, I use the term “el otro lado community” as inclusive of all artists creating art at the border. The term “el otro lado community” includes how border art is interacting with those impacted at the border, who create art on the border, and those who live on the border. Moreover, others have crossed both physical and emotional borders to make their way toward the “el otro lado.” Therefore, it also imperative to pull from the work of Gloria Anzaldúa’s theoretical framework of borderlands (1987). Within her work, Anzaldúa exhibits critical reflexivity of her life at the border. Additionally, she describes the “border between these two countries as a metaphor for all types of crossing between geopolitical boundaries, sexual transgressions, social dislocation, and the crossing necessary to exist in multiple linguistic and cultural contexts” (p.6). Allowing for a development of consciousness and knowledge of navigating two worlds and not being sole part of one space or the other, thus, giving one a status of the “outsider within” (p.7).

To fully engage with this idea and develop a deeper understanding of art as a form of activism, it is essential to understand the terms border art and trauma. Border art is defined as, “art on the border, art born from the border, art against the border, etc.” (Szary, 2012, p. 213). While considering historical trauma, I researched the work of Native American social worker and mental health expert Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2003) who defines the term historical
trauma as, “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma.” (p.7). In an interview with Smith College School of Social Work (2015), Brave Heart stressed that historical trauma is not limited to the “distant past” but rather includes everything up to the “present reality” “because everything up to a minute ago is history” (Smith College School of Social Work, 2015, 24:04). Brave Heart’s definition is an intentional frame that allows individuals to analyze and destigmatize the historical weight carried within ourselves to this day.

Researchers explored the historical conversation around the occurrence of trauma, economic welfare, social inequality, criminalization, and human rights issues that surrounds both physical and psychological borders (Volkan, 2018) through the fields of social work, and psychology, by assessing children’s experiences with trauma and grief (Fernández, Rios, James, Martinez, & Bravo, 2012). Although each field provides a different context, I found a consistency of trauma in connection to borders found within migrant communities. These physiological and physical barriers contribute to the residual trauma prevalent among transnational citizens.

Androff and Tavassoli (2012) recognize that while transnational citizens within the U.S. represent all regions of the world, “Mexico has experienced unique economic and social challenges. . . since the mid-1990s” (p.196). Part of these challenges result from the 1993 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), growth of illegal drug trade, corruption, and violence. Additionally, Gene Hernandez, Prima County Office of the Medical Examiner also stated, “Well it’s not a secret, the more that the border has been militarized for whatever reason it seems to push folks out into the more remote regions of the desert” (Gonzalez, 2017, p.165). Thus, not only has the monetary inequality generated by U.S. policy influence migrant
criminalized trends, but the opening along the border known as the Sonoran Desert remains purposeful and dangerous.

The Sonora Desert spans along the U.S.-Mexico border at 120,000 square miles. Due to its high and low temperatures of 120°F (in summer) and below 32°F (in winter) plays a part in the desert’s inability to produce natural resources such as water, and plant life to maintain human life. (Androff and Tavassoli, 2012, p. 165). For this reason, Androff and Tavassoli (2012) stress that criminalizing migrants has led to the violation of human rights including: “migrant deaths”, . . . "mass hearings," . . . and “inhumane deportation practices.” (p.166). These studies stress the traumatic impact that resides along borders that linger in the day-to-day life of migrants even after crossing through policy and forms of othering (Androff and Tavassoli, 2012; Volkan, 2018).

*Space and place in the Context of Political Aesthetics*

Space and place have also been connected to broader political work. For instance, Elinor Light’s work is well-known for their contribution through political power of art with regards to space and place. Specifically, Light utilizes the term emplaced vernacular to describe the effects of political aesthetics in their relation to a specific place and narrative to a specific group and area. Thus, this work also pulls from notions of “emplaced vernacular,” according to Light (2018) “emplaced vernaculars” are forms of multifaceted dialect “that takes seriously the political power of aesthetics and the particularities of place and space” (p. 180). Within their work Light, looked at 1970’s New Your City graffiti writers of “Taki 183” and a global symbol and phrase, “Kilroy was Here” connected to WWII in connection to space and place. Light found that “emplaced vernacular” was connected to dominant spatial ideologies that produces subjectivity through visual production.
In both examples of their work, a connection of the location in artwork emerge as a known dialogue to the connection of “Taki 183” and “Kilroy was here.” Within both examples, Light found a message of resistance being shared through these symbols of graffiti. A message containing symbols challenged issues around class, race, and segregation; thus, shattering boundaries while simultaneously claiming ownership. Lastly, Light adds that the production of art through the use of graffiti is a class and race issue within itself. Nonetheless, he argues that graffiti murals and other forms of aesthetics “also makes visible the emergence of political subjects around the world” (Light, 2017, 191). Based on Light’s assessment, it is important to consider the emplaced vernacular being utilized through “el otro lado” community in order to reclaim and rename the notions of space and place along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Lastly, I explore the work of Edward Soja (1996) who defines third space philosophies. “Mobilizing this objective is a belief that the spatial dimension of our lives have never been of greater practical and political relevance than it is today” (p.1) Thus, space plays a big part of politics prominent within our everyday routines. For this reason, Soja argues, we have always been “intrinsically spatial beings, active partisans in the social construction of our embracing spatiality.” (p.1) In other words, the use of social media plays a greater role on our everyday politics and gives us the ability to interact with issues beyond everyday physical connection, making us aware of issues beyond ourselves. As a result, I argue that digital and social media play a part in allowing us to be border crossers when we can speak on behalf of the issues forming in one part of the world, even while living on the opposite side. The ability to do so manipulates the physicality of space and allows us to be spatial beings.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

History of Border Art

The “outsider within” notion plays a critical part in Chicano art and the scholarly work produced to analyze its impacts. Alicia Gaspar de Alba (1998), draws from a Mestiza consciousness to contribute to conversations highlighting the falsehoods around multiculturalism within her work titled, “Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition.” Within this case study, Gaspar de Alba critically looks at an early 90’s art exhibition named CARA (Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation). CARA was part of a national tour that showcased Chicano art and the 1960’s Chicano Movement, a movement that had been “locked out of the mainstream institutions” (Nunn, 2000, p.1). As a result, Gaspar de Alba expresses that multicultural paradigms do not leave or give space to “analyze power relations” (Gaspar de Alba, 1998, part 3) but rather mask white privilege through this need to capitalize on differences, meaning that adding multicultural components to a classroom or an art exhibit is not enough to create change. Critical reflexivity is necessary to understand the power dynamics at hand to fully value Chicano art and its people. Therefore, it is needed to analyze the structure of the museum, the individuals who took part in creating the exhibit, the layout, advertising, the rhetoric, and the distribution of economy. Without this greater consciousness, the perpetuation of inclusive falsehoods continues.

Gaspar de Alba revealed that a false reality through a hegemonic view of the movement by individuals outside the community. The narrative and work created by the Chicano community during the Chicano Movement was altered through mainstream museum exhibition of selected pieces. Nonetheless, Gaspar de Alba (1998) concludes that physically being in these spaces, “both makers and viewers destabilized the art world. . . we are part of the visible world”
Being part of the visual world goes beyond entering the shared space of western views of art structures. The “inside/outside” ideology was created to define all forms of borders. The outsiders within theoretical framework continues to dismantle the multicultural paradigm by artists showcasing their art on the physical location of the U.S.- Mexico border, therefore participating in creating border art.

**Historical Places**

Dickinson, Ott and Aoki (2006) use rhetorical analysis to focus on how historic places play a part in national identity. Through their use of museums as text, they argue, these spaces are used as a cognitive landscape, which is sometimes referred to as a “‘dreamscape’” (p.29). These locations allow visitors to admire/praise Indian culture and traditions without emphasizing or allowing others to consider, “the social and political implications of Western conquest” (p. 30-31). Furthermore, it critiques the aesthetics within museums, such as light, sound, and visuals that allow for sorrow and forgiveness. “Euro-Americans celebrate this deep past; they are cleansed of their sins for the immediate past and present” (p. 41). Through these arguments, it is understood that museums and other monuments stress a false sense of space and place, such as that the space given to include historical narratives used to uphold whiteness. The spaces create a place for visitors to leave guilt-free while others still carry the trauma with them. Likewise, these spaces also operate with biases on whose artwork to display, and generally cost admission. The process highlights the fact, that economic power plays a fact of who may experience these places and profit from artifacts that were stolen and taken from the place of origin. Border art cannot be examined in museums. Border artists are using the contested, de-constitutional border zone to contest the power dynamics and discourses set in place to traumatize brown bodies.
Border art became a form of art and expression in 1984 through the work of Guillermo Gómez-Peña. In 1985, Gómez-Peña, along with other performance enthusiasts and scholars, joined forces and formed the Border Art Workshop/ Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF) (Sheren, 2015; Fusco, 1989). Specifically, [Mexicana/o’s, Chicana/os, and Anglo-Americans] represented this bilingual group. Half of its members lived within the U.S. and the other half lived within Mexico along the Tijuana/San Diego border region (Fusco, 1989, p.1) in order to analyze the relations between the North and South borderlands. This art exhibition was executed through multiple channels such as, performance, video installations, writings, and political action (Fusco, 1989). “The BAW/TAF artists were to link performance, site-specificity, and the U.S. – Mexico border, as well as the first to export “border art” to other geographic locations and situations” (Sheren, 2015, p.23), thus, paving its way toward the concept of the “portable border.” Sheren (2015) argues, “. . .that by the twentieth century. . . borders came to represent a space of performance rather than a geographical boundary” (p.3) bring a notion around “border thinking” (p.3) and its portability. This book looks at the border as performative space with political implications. The use of digital photography and social media platforms provide space for discourse about the policies that continue to dehumanize transnational citizens and increase militarization.

Space and Place

Although border art can be categorized in many ways utilizing various outlets, it is imperative to look at the physical location of the U.S.- Mexico border as geographic location and the site of violence against brown bodies. Many scholars have viewed space and place through a transnational lens when speaking about both physical and metaphorical borders (Massy 1994; Na’puti 2019; Rowe, 2004; Shome 2003;). Arguments are made clear through the use of poetry,
imagery, text and maps that demonstrate the systemic roles of boundaries. Boundaries are places that uphold power structures and create ‘white spaces.’ For instance, Aimee Carrillo Rowe (2004) emphasizes the idea that space is culturally produced and argues that whiteness becomes a spatial force. Specifically, Carrillo Rowe (2004) focuses on how rhetoric around anti-immigration produces spatial arrangements, as exemplified during the aftermath of 911. Use words to demonstrate or define ideas around: American patriotism, who is American, and who are the victims. “It produces a spatial arrangement within the United States in which whites benefit from the violence: they may move freely, buy cheaply, and retain social control, all the while believing it is, they who are under siege.” (p. 117). Hence, this form of discourse has historically inequitably effected transnational citizens, both economically and politically. “In the case of U.S. America, white mobility is enabled at the expense of brown and black mobilities” (p.131). This follows the work of Doreen Massey (1994) in “Differentiated Mobilities” that deals with the idea of language, not only shaping the lives of individuals, but also their death (as seen historically through immigration abuse). Thus, through discourse and conquest, society determines who gains access to specific spaces and who is excluded, such as exemplified through the rhetoric that is so pivotal in Donald Trump’s political agenda.

Additionally, Raka Shome (2003) examines space and place by examining how power disrupts and brings agency to white bodies or U.S. American bodies through transnationalism. Xenophobia works to create boundaries with language use around “immigrant.” Terms like “immigrant” and “illegal” create a narrative around an individual being “out of place” and creates an “us versus them” mentality. It also reemphasizes ideas around how people utilize boundaries to keep bodies of color marginalized. Additionally, Shome argues that power dynamics go beyond rhetoric by also addressing the militarization of the border. It takes both
economic capital and “territorializing” through the employment of bodies at the border (border patrol) but also to fund it with surveillance equipment. As a result, boundaries, and borders change through power.

Tiara R. Na’puti (2019) also stresses how power rises with boundaries and gives space to geographical scholars who look at the communication of the land itself to negotiate place and space. Na’puti uses rhetorical field methods as a way to strengthen marginalized perspectives, stating resistance occurs in mapping and map-making because such actions can be used to reinforce land rights. Thus, boundaries should be created organically, the way nature intended, rather than through human manipulation. This notion aligns with Native scholar Mishwana Goeman (2013) who strives to find “spatial justice” by giving power to Native epistemologies in order to (re)map and create spatial decolonization. Goeman believes that these forms of remapping go beyond physical boundaries of a line or graph but rather is “a way of being-in-the world” (Goeman, 2013, p.13). Apart from physical map and remapping, Goeman emphasizes the power structure that upholds visual mapping. For example Goeman (2013) expressed the following:

Hidden in the rhetoric and its visual presentation - in the intent -was still the imagery of colonial empire. Exploring and discourses of mapping is necessary in understanding the way world views are represented. Maps exert political control by manipulating the representation of space into a language of normativity (p.18).

This reveals a system that only gave distinction to visual maps rooted in grids and mathematics. These maps naturalized aristocracy, outline colonial power, and disallowed any other form of visual mapping (Goeman, 2013).
These arguments emphasize the significance of space and place from a geographical perspective to be considered when looking at borders, and specifically the U.S.-Mexico border. The arguments made about militarization or the words used to dehumanize marginalized bodies uphold whiteness and play a big part in feeding the generational trauma that transpires along the border. Although some individuals focus on injustices along the border, specifically within the Trump administration, the reality of casualties along the border has historically reoccurred and effected those who experience this reality. The U.S. Border Patrol Deaths by Fiscal Year indicated a total of 3,138 deaths along the Southwest border sectors (Big Bend, Del Rio, El Centro, El Paso, Laredo, Rio Grande Valley, San Diego, Tucson, and Yuma) between 2010 and 2018. There were over 10,000 reported deaths since 1998 (CBP, 2019). However, there are discrepancies of the total number of deaths that occur at the border. A report by the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) of San Diego indicated that, “The tally does not take into account cases in which local authorities are the first to respond to calls of humanitarian organizations, border residents or other migrants” (Jimenez, 2009, p.15). As a result, reports indicate between 32% to 43% of uncounted deaths by the U.S. Border Patrol in comparison to medical examiner records (Jimenez, 2009). Additionally, the report does not include individuals who were sent back and never returned home, deaths caused by drowning in bodies of waters, or those “who are classified as locals by Mexican authorities” (Jimenez, 2009, p.15). Moreover, the report fails to reflect the additional lives that have been lost and the various policy changes enacted since 2009; such as, family separations, children in cages, missing children, those lives lost within ICE facilities, and check points.

While the border line is set in place, its militarization is expanded through check points. These check points are set in place to operate up to a hundred miles north of the border wall.
There are thirty-three permanent Border Patrol checkpoints across New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Texas (Fernández, 2019). These checkpoints can be just as dangerous, if not more, than the border wall. Manny Fernández, a reporter from The New York Times, shared his experience traveling through various check points in the month of March (2019) as a Mexican American. Fernández stated, “More undocumented immigrants die trying to circumvent the checkpoints than they do trying to get around the fence . . . every day, hundreds of thousands of people who pull up to these checkpoints have to do something other Americans in other cities don’t have to. . . answer a uniformed officer’s question about whether they are a United States citizen” (Fernández, 2019). His story reflects the innate biases that he experiences through checkpoints compared to his white counterparts. This allows for a form of otherness that furthers the emotional trauma and weight that brown bodies carry the border with them by the color of their skin. The Customs and Border Patrol reports to have a new system covering four hundred and fifty miles by the end of 2020 (Rodgers, Bailey, 2019). This new system is to include, “steel-bollard barriers, all-weather roads, lighting, enforcement cameras and other technology” (Rodgers, Bailey, 2019) along with adding a larger border radius (Rodgers, Bailey, 2019).

Though it is essential to know the development of the border it is also needed to know some of its historical and current ramifications, such as, migrant trends, policies, and mobilization.

Action-based Art

Artists strive to impact liberal order by challenging individuals to view a place otherwise forgotten in order to discuss realities around migration, mistreatment, and transnational communities. Moreover, Weber-Shrick (2015) seeks to understand how immigrant youth are reasserting their right to politics through the theoretical framework. Through this theory, Weber-Shirk explores three questions: (1) what openings do increased transnational communities create
for new relationships between people and political life?; (2) How do undocumented immigrants apply pressure on a state with which they have no formal relationship, gain recognition, and have some of their demands met?; and, (3) what makes this political recognition and response possible? Additionally, politics by unsanctioned immigrant remains the pinnacle of resistance because inalienable rights cannot be given nor taken away thus, introducing, “undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic” (p.290). “Deviant citizenship is a mode of resistance and survival for those living within the nation-state and yet permanently excluded as their every action is always already illegal because their very presence is deemed illegal” (Weber-Shrick, 2015, p. 295).

Weber-Shirk finds that The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAMers) is not an isolated movement, it actively takes a community to receive results. Part of this community includes artists using the border to communicate narratives that counties to be excluded from of the mainstream media and political discourse.

*Online or Social Media Engagement and the Impact of Activism*

Scholars seek to understand impacts of immigrant youth activism, finding liberal order by forcing the deliberations of the frameworks and circumstances that work around migration, mistreatment, and transnational communities. Moreover, Weber-Shrick (2015) seeks to understand how immigrant youth are reasserting their right to politics via the theoretical framework. Through this theory, Weber-Shirk explores three questions: (1) what openings do increased transnational communities create for new relationships between people and political life?; (2) how one undocumented immigrants able to apply pressure on a state with which they have no formal relationship, gain recognition, and have some of their demands met?; and, (3) what makes this political recognition and response possible? Additionally, politics by unsanctioned immigrant remains the pinnacle of resistance because inalienable rights cannot be
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Photography, Social Media, and Activism

Links between photography and activism have a long trajectory in the Chicano community. Gunckel (2015) proposes to analyze photographs as “social practices” because of the belief that Chicano artists situate their work outside traditional spaces to engage with the public, and to redefine “social dimension that rethinks the status of the art object and audience relations.” (p. 378). Gunckel considers many types of visual productions such as art murals, collages, and poems to demonstrate how all forms of art create political change to emphasize the power visual media possesses to create a movement. One argument highlights, “. . . photography has not only been overlooked in favor of other visual media; it was also both a key component of the movement and central to the development of an alternative sphere of cultural production on multiple counts (Gunckel, 2015, p.377). Although this study analyzes the importance of art such as photography for social movements, it lacks analysis on the transformation of social movements. This is a critical aspect of the current activism occurring around art at the border.

Based on his multitude of experiences photographing activism in humanitarian crisis situations, world-renowned photographer Ismail Ferdous similarly emphasized the impact of photography within activism, stating, “Through the power of imagery, we are pushed to question
our core beliefs and our responsibilities to each other as international citizens. In this sense, photography has the power to shine as uncompromising light on critical issues” (Ferdous, 2014, p. 25). Photography and other forms of visual media bring emotions and connections to life, allowing others to get a better understanding of the world and their role in this humanitarian crises.

Art plays a critical part in bringing change and provides an unexpected and a forward form of communication political art would not reach its full potential without the use of photography. When thinking about border art and the art that is on the physical location of the border wall, we must also think of its intended engagement and audience. A militarized border in a desert with no natural resources appears as a de-human zone. Artists may have redefined a boundary through their art piece, but the moment it was captured and shared, it personified the potential to create a movement.
Chapter 3: Methods and Design

Images communicate information and shape everyday culture. In the late 1990’s Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (1999) argued that visual culture is overlooked within the “expansion of cultural and media studies” (p.1). When considering matters of epistemology, they believe that images and the use of photography play a vast part in everyday cultural and social practices. However, knowledge is produced through all forms of media, including images. Gillian Rose (2001) highlights the importance that visuals play in culture. Rose argues that images alone do something, “Image is at least potentially a site of resistance and recalcitrance. . .” (Rose, 2001, p.10). Rose acknowledges that both written and visual text sometimes accompany one another in order to define an art piece. However, she argues, “What is much more important, I think, is simply to acknowledge that visual images can be powerful and seductive in their own right” (Rose, 2001, p.10). Likewise, Rose emphasizes how images can also be used to uphold social norms and can be a “depiction of social difference” (Rose, 2001, p.10). Thus, images illustrate power relationships and encourages/discourages action.

Visual Rhetoric and Discourse

Visual discourse shapes how humans understand the world. Apart from knowledge, Rose (2001) argues that discourse also produces subjects and serves to practice specific occupations, created through a common understanding of language and practice through institutionalized learning such as medical and law school. People create instructions to understand art, then creates language around culture, creating, “all sorts of visuals and verbal images and texts, specialized or not, and also through the practices that those languages permit” (p. 136). Rose uses intertextuality to define visual discourse in order to validate the many forms that discourse can be produced, because intertextuality refers to the fact that one image or text depends on
another image or text to carry out meaning. Therefore, “it is possible to think of visuality as a sort of discourse too” (p.137) due to its ability to make things visible and invisible simultaneously, such as the art created on the border.

I will examine the emergence of border art. Border art is categorized in many ways utilizing various mediums. However, for the purpose of this research, I will examine art created on the physical location of the U.S. and Mexico border. Specifically, I will focus on art that creates a facade or installations that (1) connects these two physical places as one and (2) that give an illusion of eliminating the border as a whole. Migrants and their families experienced an alarming increase in deportation rates in recent years (CATO, 2019), furthering societal needs for artists to actively engage with this space to draw public attention.

Specifically, I will analyze pieces created by three artists: (1) Mexican artist Ana Teresa Fernández (2) Marcos Ramírez (known as ERRE) and (3) Margarita García Asperas.

Background of Artists

(1) The first artist, Ana Teresa Fernández is a performance artist and painter, born in Tampico, Mexico in 1980. At the age of eleven, her family moved to the U.S. When Fernández was in high school, she began attending community college and enrolled in her first sculpturing class. As part of the course, she was expected to create a portfolio and present her work to The San Francisco Art Institute. Recruiters having been mesmerized by her work, instantly offered Fernández a full scholarship. As a result, Fernández graduated with her bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts in 2004 and her Masters in 2006. Fernández, has made a name for herself within the art world and showcased her work in various museums, including the National Museum of Mexican Art. As a performance artist, she strives to transform spaces in ways that challenges one’s understanding of it, and creates narratives around issues that she claims can be easily erased;
such as the 2014 Iguala mass kidnapping, historical femicide, and the separation of families at the border (Fernández, 2017). As a result, she created pieces that reflect each of these issues and highlight them within her Pennsylvania Avenue TedTalk named, *Erasure, Foreign Bodies*, and *Borrando la Frontera* (Erasing the Border). (Fernández, 2020; Fernández, 2017).

(2) The second artist, Marcos Ramírez (known as ERRE), was born in 1961, in Tijuana, Mexico. ERRE became a lawyer after receiving his law degree at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. Later on, ERRE migrated to the U.S. in 1983 (where he is now a resident) and worked as a carpenter for seventeen years. By 1989, ERRE began engaging in art. He has accomplished many things by participating in internships, lectures and exhibitions around the globe (exhibitions such as, InSite'94, InSite'97, the VI and VII Havana Biennials). Throughout his career, ERRE earned many awards for his originality and various forms of media. His purposeful site-specific installations provoke both political and social consciousness by challenging narrativity through mainstream channels. As a result, ERRE has received many awards including the 2007 United States Artist Fellowship award. Overall ERRE work strives to understand border culture and politics that he deals within his country, region, and arguably the world through his own subjectivity.

Some of ERRE’s known work consist of his 1997 *Toy An Horse* piece, ERRE built a two-headed metal and wooden horse (that referenced the Odysseys Trojan Horse) and placed it between Tijuana and San Diego so that it looked both north and south. To amplify his journey of navigating two spaces and identities, stating “Instead of feeling half Mexican and half American, I feel *double*” (Artsy, 2019). Most recently in 2014 he began his 3,721mile journey with Arizona photographer David Taylor to document his placement of forty-seven, six foot still monuments along the U.S. (without permission) in order to mark the expansion of the 1821 U.S.-
Mexico border They, piled camping gear, photo equipment, and art supplies into a van and traveled 3,721-miles to mark the expansion of the border. ERRE named this installation “DeLIMItations,” and gained mainstream attraction through channels such as Snapchat (Miranda, 2016).

In 2011, Ana Teresa Fernández began painting the bars of part of the border that separates the U.S. and Mexico between Playas de Tijuana from San Diego’s Border Field State park. As part of her vision and statement of her piece, Fernández wore a little black cocktail dress and black pumps and stood on a very tall ladder the leaned against the border wall while using a generator and spray paint gun. The end results were pale powdery blue bars that matched the view of Tijuana’s sky (Tedford, 2017). Her work inspired many artists to follow in her footsteps (Artsy, 2017). Such as Artist, ERRE) and Margarita Garcia Asperas’ 2017 piece called, Refl ecting the Border. Through the use of a tall mirror and a 16-by-4-foot table they created an allusion of a 32-by-4-foot-long table with people on both sides to eat a “communal dinner” for a “cross-border meal” (Artsy, 2017).

Methodological Framework

My methodological frameworks build on the existing work of Gillian Rose’s, “Visual Methodologies an Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials” (2001). Which considers the notion of discourse as communicated through various kinds of visual images and verbal text within a four-part phase. While the influence of Rose’s work is important and necessary, I strive to build a deeper form of visual analysis through a decolonized Mestiza consciousness lens. Decoloniality is needed in all aspects of Chicanax work, including visual discourse. Thus, it is my hope to contribute to the broader field of communication and visual discourse by including a decolonial framework. In this five-part phase, I will build from Rose’s
method and other scholars in order to bring justice to political art, visual discourse, and to the communities in which they serve. In four phases, I emphasize Rose’s visual discourse method, while adding a fifth phase that I have created to center the importance of a decolonial lens when analyzing visual discourse.

- **(Phase 1) Finding a Source:** I selected two images from the span of six years (2011-2017) of border art created during the Obama and Trump administrations. Specifically, with permission from the artist, I collected these images from the personal websites and archives of three artists (https://anateresaFernández .com/).

- **(Phase 2) Discourse analysis 1:** the production and rhetorical organization of discourse

  1. **(Step 1: Interpretive process)** In this step, Rose specifically calls for individuals to dissociate themselves from all previous perceptions having had about the material, in order to produce a new meaning. Thus, this section calls to consider some of the following key points:
     1. Looking at your sources with fresh eyes
     2. Immersing yourself in your sources
     3. Identifying key themes in your sources
     4. Examining their effect of truth
     5. Paying attention to their complexity and contradictions
     6. Looking for the invisible as well as the visible
     7. Paying attention to details. (Rose, 2001, p.158)

However, a decolonial Chicana consciousness is vital to take into consideration the original version of why these images were first made and/or taken. While one may interpret art, political art is created to make a statement, and border art is created to challenge a specific narrative. Therefore, we cannot forget the original reasons for the creation of this artwork because these images emphasize a specific narrative and outcome that centers a humanitarian crisis versus art being created out of luxury.
Therefore, I looked at each image for one week, both in print and via a computer screen.

I printed an “8 x11” paper size of each image and taped them on my wall. I looked at each image individually for a week, rotating between print and screen to take the image in entirely, while simultaneously the computer zoom option allowing me take in specific aspects of each image. Lastly, I also looked at the images side-by-side in order to see commonalities, differences, and recurrence within each artist’s work.

2. (Step 2: Coding process): I created a coding process in connection with my content analysis. This process helped in becoming familiar with each image and identifying key themes. Thus, I create a list of words, finding relationships, and interpreting (Chapman, Wu, & Zhu, 2017).

As part of my coding process, I draw from a humanities lens. A case study created by Mimi V Chapman, Shiyou Wu, and Meihua Zhu (2017) aims to understand the experience of migrant Chinese mothers through images and group discussions. Chapman, Wu, and Zhu argue that it is important for social work to use images as a unity of analysis and recognize their ability to communicate, given that society is becoming an increasingly images-based world. Thus, to further understand humans in the realms of social work and humanities, it is necessary to understand that “images can be data in and of themselves” (p.810). While one utilizes photovoice as a method to understand the human experience, images are still not centered
as the focal text of analysis, unlike what is seen in the scholarly work of art historians. As a result, Chapman, Wu, and Zhu create a five-step process as introduction to code and interpret photographic data because they believe still images have power to provide individuals with a voice regarding complex experiences and events.

- Their five-step coding process consists of (1) **Data organization** (such as separating the image files). Within my study I have separated these files as *Image One* and *Image Two*. (2) **Code creation** (free codes or a code list). My code list consists of: colors, Objects, landscape, motion, façade, invisibility, U.S., Mexico, etc.) (3) **Coding photography** (coding by list) in this section, I listed all aspects found in *Image One* and *Image Two*, which allowed my code creation. (4) **Finding relationships** (recurrences) in this section, is where I make connections to themes. (5) **Interpretation**, examining relationships between image and themes. In this section, I connected the theme to the interpretation within the image.

While also considered the following from Roses (2001) method:

1. How are particular words of images given specific meaning?
2. Are there meaningful clusters of words and images?
3. What associations are established within such images?
4. What connections are there between such images? (p.151)

I acknowledge that within discourse analysis, new questions can occur. Prompted by the flexibility of coding, I return to my coding list with different codes sparked by each image, as long as I am allowing the images and the detailed material to guide the investigation. Moreover,
given that visuals hold dialogue and therefore can communicate it is also essential to utilize a describe, interpret, and evaluate (DIE) process (Nam & Condond, 2010; Feldman, 1976))

• (Phase 3) Exploring the social production of discourse: Broadly, this phase takes into consideration the specifics of place and social circumstances, such as the location of each artwork and the social implications regarding policy during the artist’s creation.

• (Phase 4) Reflecting on doing discourse analysis: Taking part in discourse analysis demands some sort of critical reflexivity by situating myself in the research. Therefore, Rose (2001) calls to recognize the power of visual images and its limits. Considering the question, “What do pictures really want?” (Rose, 2001, p.160). Rose claims, that, “if you are writing a discourse analysis, then the arguments about discourse, power and truth/knowledge are just as pertinent to your work as to the materials you are analyzing.” (Rose, 2001, p.160) Lastly, I consider Rose’s questions (as demonstrated below)

1. Using detailed textual or visual evidence to support your analysis.
2. Using textual or visual details to support you analysis.
3. The coherence the study provides discourse examined
4. The coherence of the analysis itself
5. The coherence of the study in relation to previous related research.
6. The examination of cases that run counter to the discursive norm established by the analysis, in order to affirm the disruption caused by such deviations. (Rose, 2001p.161)

Phase Five

Within the arguments of discourse, some (Rose 2001; Goeman, 2013; Latorre2010) have stressed how the understanding and analyzing of discourse is still rooted in western ideology,
and specific power structures in minds, such as analyzing art in museums. Thus, while I look at the discourse in activist art, it is also imperative to decolonize my method, keeping in mind the transnational citizen population, the artist and the issues that surround both immigration policy and the border. Thus, within this section, I introduce a fifth phase that takes into account trauma, decolonization, and political consciousness when analyzing these two images.

Therefore, in addition to utilizing Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart’s (Brave Heart, 2003) understanding of generational trauma, it is needed to utilize Guisela Latorre’s “political consciousness” of “Chicana/o views” (Latorre, 2010). Guisela Latorre (2010) argues for a “Cognitive Science” as a theoretical approach for inquiry and exploration when delving into both the artistic and political impact of Chicana/o aesthetic. Latorre believes because Chicana/o artists use their visual work to challenge power dynamics and social practice in order to provoke political consciousness, it has historically been deemed “bad” or its impact deemed small by the standards of “Eurocentric formal and iconographic analyses” (p.111). Thus, breaking bondage goes far beyond fighting against the monopolization of our bodies, and the colonization of our minds. Therefore, it continuously needed to break from the western standards of what artwork is deemed worth “bad” or “good” in order to reclaim our own meaning from analysis.

Part of this deeper cognitive approach also considers the tools and materials the artists use as part of the overall analysis. The art piece is only one aspect of the analysis process that forms political consciousness. We understand Chicana/o views and understood when we consider the tools and materials at the artists, “disposal to affect the emotive response to visual stimuli” (Latorre, 2010, p.118). While Latorre recognizes the importance of aesthetic analysis, he also stresses the importance of looking at the produced and consumption of visual culture, because
these forms of art are created for the people. Thus, they belong to the people. This type of production of Chicano aesthetics, is known as rasquachismo.

*Rasquachismo* stems from the word *rasquache*, in Spanish *rasquache* is used to describe something of no value, something that is left as scrap (Anserson, 2017). Within Chicano terminology *rasquache* describes a lower-class attitude, being cheap, “the taste or lifestyle of the underdog.” (Anderson, 2017). Although, this term has been used to describe something that is viewed as cheap, its classification in the art world gives pride to the “fake it ‘till you make it” mantra that coincides with aesthetic categories such as, expressionism, minimalism and surrealism (Anderson, 2017). Scholars Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, and Chicano artist Josh T. Franco, are known for their role in arguing how *rasquachismo* is a “useful and specific art category,” (Franco, 2017) given that this word describes the process of assembling and creating sculptures from random “found objects.”

In an interview with Smithsonian Magazine well-known actor, activist, and art producer Cheech Marin stated, “Anybody who knows rasquache recognizes it immediately” (Shah, 2019) because the spirit of *rasquache* is creating art with random objects. “It’s not art made of gold, it’s made of tin, dirt or mud” (Shah, 2019). These productions are not limited to artworks and pieces alone; *rasquachismo* attitude reclaims identity, social, and economic class. Stacy I Macias (2016) describes rasquache as a form of style that highlights the attire of the working-class that gestures vibrant colors, salvaged materials, and forms of vernacular. Moreover, Macias (2016) takes a dapper look at politics for fashion, specifically for Latinas. Macias states, Latina fashions “evoke a non-white racial identity that cannot be congruent with university, unmarkedness, and social privilege…” (Macias, 2016, p.323-324) through what she calls a racialized rasquache
raunch style (Macias, 2016, p.323). Thus, rasquache takes a deeper look at how visual culture is produced and consumed.

Given that artists have rare abilities to use the aesthetics in exceedingly efficient and emotional ways, we must not overlook their “creative agency” (Latorre, 2010, p.118). Thus, we must consider the tools utilized to create their art. Furthermore, this research also pulls from Sarah Pink’s Digital Ethnography Principles of Understanding (2016) and the belief that “. . . digital must be understood as situated in the everyday world” (Gyor, 2017, p.133). It is also important to consider impacts of the online world and how to analyze the work of digital photography through media.

Photography

It is also noteworthy to recognize that I examined the images I collected within this thesis through a digital medium platform. Nonetheless, especially when working with virtual art worlds, such as Snapchat, Instagram, blogs, and news outlets, it is also valuable to acknowledge the roles that photography plays in historic trauma and decolonization; thus, I also explored the work of Pedri-Spade (2017). Pedri-Spade argues how photography, in a global context, is an “object and a method of decolonization” (p.106). “Spade does so in two ways: (1) through archived collections of colonial photography and (2) in the production of contemporary photographs by peoples who experience contemporary colonialism” (p.106). Therefore, arguing photography has the power for individuals to “confront colonial past(s)” (p.111) and connect to present day in order to bring healing through de-colonial praxis. Therefore, this work not only creates art but also documents a narrative that amplifies or validates our trauma in order to bring healing and validation.
Through the use of digital photography, these artists add a visual layer to an ongoing issue surrounding migratory criminalization within U.S. immigration policy. While these visual displays led to increased attention surrounding political issues, research is limited when it comes to studying audiences at large. These visual art pieces reach and speak through the use of digital photography. Through digital photography, one may view these images by greater audiences/communities and shared through mainstream media. This makes it possible to reach those who do not directly visit the border but benefit from its presence, and who push for its development. For this reason, this study seeks to add to the conversation surrounding political art discourse, emphasizing that alone, political art would not reach its full potential without the use of photography as a form of resistance.

**Political Context**

In June 2015, Donald Trump announced that his candidacy for president, "So, ladies and gentlemen, I am officially running for president of the United States, and we are going to make our country great again" (Diamond, 2015, p.1). As part of his staple “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) campaign, Trump’s political platform promised to build a border wall between Mexico and the U.S. Rallies frequently resonated with chants of “build that wall,” and after the election, the media published a poll indicating nearly eight out of every ten Trump supporters favored building a wall along the southern border of the U.S. (Gramlich, 2016, p.1). Trump vowed to further the militarization and construction of the border wall along the southern region of the U.S., and he further promised that Mexico would fund it (Law, 2019).

Unfortunately, the topic of immigration has been oversimplified or outright dismissed by many politicians within the U.S., even though its implications and complexities remain much broader. The question of Mexican and Central American immigration, in particular; continues to
receive attention during Trump’s presidency, often cast in a negative light. Throughout his 2016 campaign, Trump fed into negative views of Latino immigrants, such as disparaging Mexican migrants, stating, “When *Mexico* sends its people, they’re not sending their best. . . They’re sending people with lots of problems. . . they bring drugs, they’re bringing crime, they’re rapists . . .” (Lee, 2015, p.1; Mark, 2018).

In early 2019, Trump declared a state of emergency regarding the increase of migrants entering the U.S. at the southern border (Rodgers and Bailey, 2019). As a result, the *New York Times* reported a historical thirty-four day government shutdown (Zaveri, Gates, & Zraick, 2019) that transpired from the pushback of both parties denying Trump’s demand for allocating $5.7 billion in taxpayer money to go toward funding the wall along the U.S.- Mexico border (Bryan, 2019). The Trump administration continues to make decisions profoundly impacting migrant populations, such as announcing the end of DACA (Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals) (Johnson, 2017) and introducing the *Zero Tolerance Policy* (Jenkins, 2018).

Trump reinforced the same ideas around migration during the mid-term elections. On October 29, 2018, *The New York Times* reported that Trump’s administration sent more than “5,000 active-duty military troops . . . to the Southern US border . . . to restore order” (Shar & Gibbons-Neff, 2018). *The Washington Post* published further developments of this story on November 3, 2018, indicating the presence of armed militia groups to prevent “unknown Middle Easterners” (Grant, 2018) and criminals in “caravans.” (Grant, 2018), further expressing that Trump’s rhetoric about criminality (Grant, 2018).

While the Trump administration reportedly has lower removal rates (Nowrasteh, 2019), the implementation of *The Zero Tolerance Policy* furthers the inhuman reality of detainments. On May 7th, 2018 *TIME* reported the announcement made by Attorney General Jeff Sessions
during a law enforcement event, stating, ". . . the U.S. will take a stricter stance on illegal crossings at the Mexico border by separating parents from children rather than keeping them together in detention centers” (Jenkins, 2018). Sessions indicated that there was a “massive inflex” of individuals crossing the Southwest border and, “If you are smuggling a child then we will prosecute you, and that child will be separated from you as required by law” (Jenkins, 2018). By Fall 2019, *TIME* reported that, “Approximately 5,500 migrant children were separated from their parents by the Trump Administration” (Aguilera, 2019).

Child separations are just one layer of this unjust act. In order to reunite these children with their families, it is important to know when these separations occurred, the current location of their families, and if they are a part of the a class action suit against ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) (Aguilera, 2019). Reports state that over 2,800 children must appear before a judge in Harlingen, Texas for their criminalization under *The Zero Tolerance Act* (Aguilera, 2019). Children as young as three, “are being ordered into court for their own deportation proceedings” (Jewett & Luthra, 2018 pg. 1). Public outrage and mobilization led to revoking the Zero Tolerance Act in June 2018, though reportedly family separations continue and not all children have been reunited (Montoya-Galvez, 2020). These numbers increase at an alarming and inhumane rate. Currently, the U.S. remains the leading country for the number of detained children with 69,550 children in U.S. custody. (Higgens, 2019). Apart from separations, migrants endure the trauma of sexual assault, sexual molestation, and at times death while being detained by ICE. Twenty-two deaths reported between the years of 2013 and 2018 (Tahir, 2019). *The New Your Times* has reported, “that the federal government received more
than 4,500 complaints in four years about the sexual abuse of immigrant children who were being held at government-funded detention facilities” (Haag, 2019, p.1). Conditions may only worsen during the rise of the current global pandemic.

Trump made various strides to further the militarization of the border. Currently, Trump’s Administration diverted $3.6 billion U.S. Dollars from military projects to build the wall (Grisales, 2019). The border between the United States and Mexico stretches approximately 2,000 miles from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean and touches the states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Additionally, 700 miles of the border is covered with barbed wire, chain link, underground sensors, and thousands of cameras (Kiersz, 2013). The U.S. Border Patrol utilizes aircraft, drones, and boats to monitor the boundary (Klein, 2018).

Trump’s rhetoric against migrants/transnational citizens goes far beyond policy changes. On August 3rd, 2019, a gunman opened fire in Walmart in El Paso, Texas (and a nearby shopping mall) “leaving 20 people dead and 26 injured” (Blankstein & Burke, 2019). Some journalists question Trump’s influence in the 2019 El Paso Shooting connection (Baker & Shear, 2019) due to the language found in the shooters online manifesto post. “This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas,” (Baker & Shear, 2019), a narrative amplified through Trump’s campaign rallies. “President Trump repeatedly warned that America was under attack by immigrants heading for the border. ‘You look at what is marching up, that is an invasion!’ he declared at one rally.” (Baker & Shear, 2019). This is only one example of the violence demonstrated along the border that forced those outside the migrant community to take notice.
Migration Trends

**Southwest Region**

The Southwest region of the U.S., including Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah, has experienced colonization by multiple governments as an original territory of Mexico until the mid-1800s. Parts of the area then became a territory of the U.S. in 1848 under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. By 1920, the U.S. experienced a decrease in the labor force due to World War II. Consequently, recruiters began inviting foreign workers. “This marked the beginning of a massive flow of immigrants from Mexico and Central America” (Limón, 2005, p. 22). Two million individuals migrated from these areas into the U.S. seeking employment (Limón, 2005). Additionally, the stock market crash of 1929 also played a critical role in the migration patterns. “Following the Great Depression, the United States and Mexico developed a new plan to return Mexican workers to their original home. This repatriation program led to the deportation of nearly 500,000 Mexican Americans” (Limón, 2005, p. 22).

**1942-1964: The Bracero Program**

Migration patterns also increased between the U.S.-Mexico border in 1942 following the implementation of The Bracero Program. It was created as an emergency response to WWII because the war created a need for an increase within the U.S. agriculture labor force. Therefore, the U.S. contracted with Mexico to import 4.6 million agriculture labor workers. Originally, the program was set to conclude after the war, but new contracts kept the program active for twenty-two years (Snodgrass, 2011, p. 88). Some U.S. Americans felt it was a form of legalized slavery and imported colonialism, though individuals participating in the program would not speak negatively about it due to the improvement of Mexico’s working conditions (Snodgrass, 2011). Later, Mexican participants built factories within Mexico, creating job opportunities in hopes
that those from Mexico who took part in the Bracero Program would leave the U.S., or at least reduce the number of Mexican citizens migrating to the U.S. However, this was not the case; Mexican immigrants did not return to Mexico voluntarily, resulting in mass deportations in 1954 of Mexican immigrants and their families, including those born in the U.S. These U.S.-born children would later return to the U.S. as young adults fighting for justice during the Chicano Movement (Snodgrass, 2011).

1968 High School Walkouts

In 1968, Mexican-American high school students in California went on strike. Tired of discrimination, poor treatment, and lack of educational representatives, historical inclusion and higher education opportunities, thousands of students flooded the streets, demanding change in school policies. These events, referred to as “walkouts,” together formed a significant Mexican-American youth movement; others joined the movement all around the country. In March of 1969, Denver, Colorado hosted the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, drawing leaders across the globe and resulting in the creation of many other activist organizations (Munoz, 1989, p. 1). High school students were at the forefront of this social awakening, creating a rise in grassroots mobility, and influencing the awareness of activism within the Chicano community. These uprisings of mobility in combination with establishing a voting bloc with John F. Kennedy’s presidential win, which gave space to further fight for injustices (Nittle, 2020). As a result, many organizations were created such as, El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan, El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano De Aztlan (MEChA) and Farmers United (Munoz, 1989). This shift in grassroots mobility influences an awareness of Chicano activism known as, the Chicano Movement. The Chicano Movement emerged during the Civil Rights era, and three key
components were highlighted within its agenda, (1) restoration of land, (2) rights for
farmworkers, and (3) education reforms (Nittle, 2020).

Immigration Policies after World War II

In 1965, Congress enacted a new immigration policy titled, [Immigration and Nationality
Act] that changed the migration patterns of Mexico by altering its process. As a result, in 1976,
visas were assigned based on family ties and occupational skills. Additionally, the U.S. set
quotes limiting the number of individuals that could migrate to the U.S. by hemisphere and
country. These strict guidelines increase the number of undocumented individuals by over one
million. By the late 70’s, the number dropped and then increased by the mid 80’s, while Mexico’s
reports indicate entirely different numbers at a lower rate. “US officials estimated that between
60 and 75 percent of all apprehended immigrants during those years were Mexicans” (Overmyer-
Velazquez, 2011, p.109-111). These alarming apprehensions sparked fear in the public circulated
by media as an “illegal alien invasion” (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011, p.111) with an exaggerated
figure of twelve million undocumented individuals living freely in the U.S. in hopes of gaining a
demand for border enforcement.

The U.S. Census demographics reported that undocumented populations did not exceed
six million (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011). This greatly influenced immigration policy in the
1970’s and the ongoing disputes on passing and rejecting bills on holding employers who hired
undocumented individuals accountable; leading Jimmy Carter to win his presidential campaign
by him promising to address immigration issues. (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011)

The Carter Plan “Tortilla Curtain” 1978-1979

In 1977, Carter proposed a five-point plan in order to, “reduce the increasing flow of
undocumented aliens … and to regulate the presence of the millions of undocumented aliens
already here” (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011, p.112). Some of these points within Carters plan included criminalizing the hiring of undocumented workers by imposing a $1,000 fine per undocumented individual hire, and increasing southern border portal by sending at least 2,000 border portal agents (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011, p.112-113). Carter received backlash from all sides, furious about his plan to allow amnesty and Mexico furious at the “anti-Mexican rhetoric in media, and in Washington” (p.113). The friction between U.S. and Mexico increased in 1978 when a plan became public that the U.S. would build a “military-like fence along the border to keep unlawful immigrants and smugglers from entering the country” (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011, p.113). This plan would later be sensationalized in media and be known as the “Tortilla Curtain.”

In the late 70’s (1977-1978) the U.S. would fund building fences in El Paso, San Ysidro, San Luis, and Arizona (p.115) to (1) replace the damages to the current boundaries and (2) “to force undocumented immigrants away from the urban areas and into the open desert where they could be caught more easily” (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011, p.115). This plan was intended to create death not, just by its desert paths, but its militarized torture. These actions glamorized the added danger by publicly announcing their incorporation of a barbwire top twelve-foot fence that holds the ability to, “sever the toes of anyone trying to scale [them]” (p.116). This sparked a public outcry and Chicano activist and other Mexican-American organizations demanded to end the new border construction. After demonstrations and Carter’s meeting with Mexico’s President Jose Lopez, the design of the border changed eliminating the barbed wire, razors, and reducing the length of the fences in El Paso and San Ysidro (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011, p.116-117).
Operation Gatekeeper 1994

Operation Gatekeeper is a monumental border tactic that altered the landscape of the U.S.-Mexico border. In 1994, the Clinton administration-initiated Operation Gatekeeper in the southern region of California in order to enhance boundary enforcement to reduce unsanctioned migrant crossings. Officials positioned the 2,000-mile-long divide in a heavy traffic and narrow stretch that claimed the lives of migrants trying to flee across the area and off the shoulders of highway in and around San Diego (Nevins, 2010). Gatekeeper also aimed to reduce drug operations and compensated for the lack of police along the divide. Therefore, Gatekeeper, was a, “prevention through deterrence strategy that attempts to prevent migrants from entering the United States (as opposed to the old strategy of apprehending migrants after they cross) through the forward deployment of Border Patrol agents, and increased use of surveillance technologies and support infrastructure” (Nevins, 2010, p.2). This policy centered around keeping Americans safe in the name of National Security that Nevins (2010) argues is the beginning of the, “ever-changing context of boundaries and the global nation-state system that they help to define” (p.4). Nevins further argues the implications that the border experienced post 9/11, emphasizing the need for technological advancements and militarization at the border in order to keep America safe.

Immigration Reform Protest of 2006

In the spring of 2006, marches occurred across the U.S. to stand against H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. The act proposed erecting a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border. Also, businesses, churches, and social service agencies would be held accountable by law if they hired or provided any form of aid or assistance to undocumented individuals (Voss & Bloemraad 2011). Moreover, those who took
part in helping individuals while knowing their legal status would be accountable for greater punishment. In response to H.R. 4437, many individuals acted in a national march know as, “Waking the Sleeping Giant” (Voss & Bloemraad 2011). On May 1, 2006 Latina/o activists took the day off or left their work to emphasize the importance of their presence in the workforce and in the fabric of the U.S. Immigrants and activists took an economic stance to underline the decrease in financial gain for the U.S. if Latina/os were not a part its economy. Social media and art played a big part in the turnout for this event. Radio outlets and radio hosts such as El Piolín helped promote the working class to take action with grassroots mobilization, in turn helping create a multi-generational movement. Kim Voss and Irene Bloemraad (2011) researched whether this movement contributed to the failure of H.R. 4337, mainly through positioning this movement as family-oriented. Many young people gathered at the Capitol with Mexican flags creating even greater controversy.

**DACA Rallies 2017**

Though many direct actions created change for U.S. immigrant Latinx communities, there is still a constant battle to humanize immigration. On September 5, 2017, the Trump administration gave Congress six months to preserve the program before DACA (Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals) recipients lost their status in March 2018. DACA is an executive branch policy decision made during the Obama administration, announced on June 15, 2012, by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in response to Congress’s failure to pass the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. The DREAM Act was written to grant permanent legal residency status to immigrant minors meeting specific criteria. The DACA policy, temporary discretionary action intended to defer actions of immigration enforcement against individuals who entered the U.S. undocumented as children for a renewable
period of two years. Individuals must apply for DACA status. Receiving DACA status does not result in amnesty, a path to citizenship, or legal status, nor does it provide eligibility for federal welfare or student aid. However, DACA status does allow individuals to seek work or attain higher education with the suspension of deportation (Fiflis, 2013).

Given the importance of such an act, many states were threatening to file a lawsuit against the Trump administration if he did not end the program. On the other hand, Trump’s administration met backlash from the public by finishing the program, including several GOP leaders. Finally, this program includes far-reaching effects, as well as impacting 800,000 immigrant children, disrupting a significant portion of the workforce, and impacting enrollment and retention rates in colleges and universities. However, companies like CNBC have addressed how those a part of DACA bring a competitive edge and economic success to all businesses (University Wire, p. 1). However, casting such consequences in terms of political and economic outcomes fails to capture the personal, human perspective of those impacted by the decision.
Chapter 4: Analysis

In this chapter, I focus my analysis on two images, that demonstrate the artwork of three artists. I collected the images from the artist themselves and/or their personal webpages and received written consent to utilize the images from the artist who created them. Mainstream media recognizes the artist and their images for creating artwork on the U.S.- Mexico border in response to migratory U.S. administration policies and the militarization of the border (Artsy, 2017) between the span of 2011 and 2017. Specifically, I remember Snapchat highlighting various artist works in connection to borders both past and present in the fall of 2017. The artists and artwork they shared left a lasting impression and I instantly thought of these images again once delving into border art research. While I interacted within these images on some level in the past, I needed to delve much further.

Consequently, over a series of weeks, I utilize both print and digital photo forms to engage with these photos on multiple levels within my analysis processes. Furthermore, I utilize a Chicanx consciousness framework and a decolonial lens in reflection of my own experiences with borders. As a result, themes arose to address my research question concerning what is being communicated within art by creating a “façade of invisibility” at the U.S.- Mexico border. In addition, I used a process known, as Describe, Interpret and Evaluate (DIE) (Nam & Condond, 2010; Feldman, 1976) Viewers must observe each category within the process to view the image as is, describing what they see. The process calls for analyzing, interpreting meaning, and taking into account the artist reasoning and meaning for creating such installations. In addition, I took into account historical context and witnessing decolonial practice in order to analyze this work through a Chicanx/ Mestiza consciousness.
Through the use of Gillian Rose’s (2001) four phases of visual discourse and incorporating a DIE as part of a social and art coding process, themes and subthemes were utilized within this section in order to present my analysis. There are four overarching themes, which were revealed to address each portion of my research question. The themes are: (1) invisibility (2) facade, (3) transforming national borders (4) communication. In the first theme, *invisibility*, I examine how photography plays a critical part in capturing the process of erasure, and the process of being unseen. Moreover, I also explore the symbolism of hyper femininity and how this identity contributes to the communication that circulates around woman being invisible along the border. In the second theme, *façade*, I explore the symbolism used within the images and the objects of centering bodies within their work that communicate a false perception or façade of “the American dream” narrative that plays a part in romanticizing the border. In the third theme, *communication in context*, I consider the deeper meaning of what is being communicated within these images; thus, finding a recurrence of trauma and resilience that is part of a larger conversation. Lastly, within my fourth and final theme, *transforming national borders*, analyzes what aspects of the image would indicate what side of the border, is what is being communicated on one side the same as the other, and what power structures of symbolism, whiteness, and militarization on the U.S.-Mexico border.

The next part of this section reflects a decolonial lens framework to understand what is being communicated through visual discourse that highlights political art within these two images. While there were many aspects that were found within each image’s coding process, the analysis below emphasizes the common themes, differences, and what is being communicated overall. I anticipated digital photography being a critical component for visual discourse and resistance given its ability to create a movement through shared spaces, such as, social media.
Though, I did not consider the greater role digital photography played within the process of creating art in order to demonstrate emplaced vernacular, resistance and resilience through the reclaiming of space. Thus, resilience and resistance were not solely experienced by having the border appear imaginary, but also experienced through the physical act of the process of making the border unseen. Furthermore, I also understood that some challenges might arise by limiting these performative creations into one image versus include multiple samples from each installation, I did not anticipate that I would not get tired of looking at one image. Through this process I was able to see the full image by analyzing it as is, in depth, with purpose, and through a decolonial lens. I was able to understand the communicative power of an image and why visual forms of discourse must include a critical emphasis in communication studies as a way of bringing marginalized narratives and spaces forward.

Lastly, this process was difficult, both on a personal level and broader context, to do in-depth research on the border, one must acknowledge the additional layers that the current administration strives to add to various forms of barriers, the many migratory policies placed into action, and the continuous injustice that still surrounds the border today. I prepared for the historical trauma experiences that made this process challenging for me. However, history was only one part of it, present and future implications also weigh heavy. As we entered a global pandemic, another magnitude of layers appeared and continues to reveal an incredible divide. This new health crisis created another layer of fear to continue to separate these geographical spaces in the name of public health.

While a big part of the discourse historically centers xenophobia around violence, economic agendas, stealing jobs, drug dealers and rapists, it now centers a narrative around public health and safety, further militarizing the border and creating more barriers to cross to the
other side. That might also create lasting effects, not just through the U.S. side, but from Mexico as well. While the U.S. is known to try to keep its doors controlled along the southern border, in light of the pandemic, Mexico’s citizens have proposed the “shut down” of Mexico’s checkpoints, “amid fears that untested American travelers will spread coronavirus” (BBC, 2020) given the U.S.’s high COVID-19 cases. Additionally, citizens urged their president to require screenings from all U.S. travelers, students and workers who cross back and forth, and any individuals who have been deported from the U.S. (BBC, 2020).

This new reality adds to the layers of residual trauma in so many directions that calls for unity. The health disparities, along with the injustices of police brutality following the murder of George Floyd and countless others, broadcast the systemic issues claiming the lives of indigenous individuals, Black lives, and people of color at such a disproportionate rate that protesters marched the streets demanding change all around the world, highlighting marginalized groups who suffer some of the same injustices creating community through trauma, all while navigating an unstable environments (deMaría., 2012). Such as, place-based identity negotiations claim spaces, including psychological, political, cultural, and spiritual realms. Thus, “place-based identity that re-centers the focus on multiple spheres of understanding coexist with individuals, communities and landscapes” (deMaría, 2012, 262).
**Image One: Borrando La Frontera (Erasing the Border)**

*Describe*

Artist Ana Teresa Fernández created the piece *Borrando La Frontera* (erasing the border) in 2011, in response to the additional added layer of the border at Friendship Park in San Diego, California during the Obama administration. In 2017, Fernández presented a TEDTalk at the TEDxPennsylvania Avenue exposé, titled, “How Art Allowed Me to Erase Borders.” Within a sixteen-minute discussion, Fernández utilized visuals such as photography and videography to bring a visual layer to her discussed around the political art and rhetoric including her 2011 work. Fernández offered both a personal and historical context regarding her connecting to the border and the reasoning for the selected location of her 2011 mural.

Fernández shared, that in 1971, Nixon gifted the binational park (where she painted her mural) to the State of California parks. Residents, eventually called the space Friendship Park after First Lady Pat Nixon dedicated it as a place where Mexico and U.S. would be able to meet, amicably. Originally the park stayed divided by a chain fence and a free-standing monument that marked the end of the Mexican-American War. With the help of photographs, Fernández demonstrated First Lady Pat Nixon greeting individuals at Friendship Park back in the 70’s. Where she (Pat Nixon) asked, Border Patrol to cut the chain down so that she may properly greet people and residents on the other side. Fernández emphasized that Pat Nixon hated fences anywhere, and that she hoped the fence would not stand much longer. Unfortunately, the barriers between the U.S. and Mexico continued after the Nixon presidency into today’s current administration.

Fernández stated, “In 1994, a metal wall arose, through Operation Gatekeeper, and “in 2005, it was translated into these train tracks that look like prison bars.” (Fernández,
While these divisions continued, it did not halt individuals from utilizing the space for its original purpose. Families and loved ones still meet on the premises after years of not seeing each other. They greet, hug, and kiss one another. However, this factor changed in 2011. Fernández demonstrated another added layer of the border by showing the challenges individuals faced, even touch each other’s fingertips. Stating, that “...under the Obama administration, where people were now only able to touch their fingertips through this thick metal mesh” (Fernández, 2017, 00:11:56:-00:12:03). Knowing that these borders kept developing rather than dismantled left Fernández in a rage. Thus, she utilized paint, her most powerful weapon, in order, “to bring the sky back down, between the US and Mexico” (Fernández, 2017, 00:12:28:-00:12:34). One early morning, Fernández began erasing the border with the utilization of a paint gun for five hours. Therefore, the image that I analyze is one of the many photographs Fernández took of herself in the performative act of erasing the border.

Withing Image One: Borrando La Frontera (erasing the border) at first glance, one can easily see a woman’s figure, with a paint brush in her right-hand painting over the darken train track bars with a lighter color. Natural color tones occur within the photograph, warm tan tones, white, and soft blues. The photography matches the scenery of a beach in the early morning with an abandoned beach, foggy skies that cover a city at a far distance. Along with the frozen action of sea breeze that depicts a large body of water moving in the process of creating waves. One sees the colors of blue, gray, and white within a nearby ocean. Free of additional individuals the image centers the still rocks, gravel, sand, and birds located at a distance. Other objects surround the figured woman that can be interpreted as the needed tools to complete an art project, such as, a ladder, a cord and a box. The overall mood of this photograph represents a sense of calmness, and yet loneliness all at once.
Interpret

Fernández centers her body within her work and demonstrates so in this specific photograph. One sees nearly twenty of these train tracked bars within the landscape framed image, along with an additional added bordered layer of a wired fence. Out of the twenty pillars visible, thirteen bars are in the process of being painted. A transition of the border’s hard-to-miss dark black color turn into a lighter shade of white and powdery blue. Moving from right to left of the image, two fully captured black bars are seen, and sectioned off into different painting stages. The artist painted first six bars from top to bottom, with the bottom portioned fully covered in a lighter blue shade while the top half is in the first stages, with a few coats painted. The upper bars appear a little distressed with the texture of paint brush streaks that soon transition to a smooth blue paint tone as far up as Fernández can reach to the bottom of the bars. These distress bars and brushed textured continue fully within the full length of the following two bars, but only completed halfway within the last four sections of the painted bars. Once again, a light layer coat that reaches as high as the artist can physically go, and the texture consistent of white and brown patches dominates the scene. The texture stays consistent with the use of a spray can and gun, while the remaining five include an original untouched black look.

Apart from the train track bars, other objects and visuals are also apparent. Within the image, a slim brown bodied woman in a strapless black dress stretches her right arm above her head as she continues to paint the border. Moreover, one partially sees the woman’s upper left arm a little past her elbow, with her for arm wrestling at her side and her arm covering the front portion of her body. As her back faces the lens, her front body faces the border. The length of her dress rests slightly above the crease of her knees; exposing her legs. Her styled-up hair leaves a portion of her upper back visible, presenting a feminine brown woman’s body. Zooming into
the image from the computer allows a better view of the woman’s black closed-toed heels with a portion of her left heel appearing buried underneath the sand.

Lastly, a black cord sits on the sand and runs near the woman’s feet and slightly under the ladder. The cord moves up as it hangs on a wired fence on the other side of the border, near the same height as the artist’s hip. Glimpses between the border’s pillars, allow viewers to see the other side. Between these bars, one sees at a distance ocean waves, along with a light layer of fog, mist, rocks, gravel, and tire track marks that cover parts of the beach. One views the other parts as smooth (mainly on the left side of the image nearest to the body of water). When zooming in, birds are noticed at a distance along the shore; and at a greater distance, it appears that some trees and maybe buildings comprise a city area. Two boxes near the feet of the artist stacked, one on top of the other, and a very tall later leaning on pillars ten and eleven (counting from right to left) also comprise the photo.
Image One: Borrando La Frontera (Erasing the Border)

(Fernández, 2011)
Image Two: Reflecting the Border

Describe

Artists ERRE (Marcos Ramírez) and Margarita García Asperas created an art installation piece called Reflecting the Border, an aesthetic, a part of a great performance piece in 2017. In an article published by Artsy on March 6, 2017 titled, “For Artists, the U.S.-Mexico Border Is Fertile Territory” highlighted the work of various artists along the border emphasizing both current and past notions of why artists engage with the frontera (border). Specifically, the article highlights ERRE and Margarita’s art piece, stating that, while Trump’s proposal to fund and expand a 1,000 mile-long and multi-million dollar wall, it additionally, “inspired artists, who have responded with designs... urging Trump to commission Christo to build a version of his and Jeanne-Claude’s iconic Running Fence along the border” (Stromberg, 2017). In the late 70’s artist Christo and Jeanne-Claude created a piece titled, Running Fence, on the U.S. and Mexico border made of heavy woven white nylon fabric covering up 2,152,780 square feet along the border region (Christo & Jeanne-Claude, 2020). They did so to call attention and to provoke a different mindset and relationship with this arbitrary representation of a politicized geographical line. Subsequently, we are witnessing manifestations of artists redefining the border with other material, such as paint and mirrors.

Through the use of a tall mirror and a 16 X 4-foot table, artists ERRE and Margarita created an illusion of a 32-by-4-foot-long table, in essence the table and mirrors connected individuals on both sides to eat a “communal dinner” for a “cross-border meal” as part of the great performative narrative of their art piece (Stromberg, 2017). The photograph made by artist ERRE captures parts of the border wall as well as
the art piece. The artists set the table against the mirrors, creating an illusion of a larger table with blankets, eating utensils, and individuals reflected at a distance within the mirror. The landscape and warm colors of a golden sand indicate that the image was shot during sundown with its warm glow and a slight visibility of a sun going down. A body of water, rock, gravel, and a cliff stand visible in addition to the natural color tones of the beach. Part from the natural color tones of a beach. The image’s mood reads as calm, inviting, and peaceful. The landscape captures twenty pillars of the border wall within its frame, allowing the image to capture the full height of the displayed mirrors. It provides a view of the top of the border that captures its full height. Four large mirrors are placed on ten pillars/ the border wall with five visible pillars on each side, creating an illusion that eliminates a portion of this multi-layered border wall (of pillars and wired fence) and reflecting an entry point to the other side “el otro lado”. Its rectangular-shaped mirrors imitate the shape of a door or a type of entryway along the border. Although the mirrors do not reach the top of the border’s pillars, they pass the height of the wired fence.

*Interpret*

The mirrors establish an entryway illusion at the center of the table. The table consists wooden legs and additional reflective layers that utilize additional mirrors as the tabletop. The table extends long enough to fit potentially at least a dozen individuals given the twelve spoons placed throughout the physical table (and an additional amount is reflected). However, a created illusion feeds more people through the reflection of the mirrors, that easily doubles, if not triples, its places for individuals. Six vibrant *serape* blankets are served as seating areas on the dirt. These blankets appear in shades of green, purple, red, pink, blue, orange, tan and white. Additionally, a few individuals captured in
the photo include four individuals standing near the table, and an additional three to four objects are viewed in the vast distance, appearing as body figurines. Three of the four body shapes appearing in the image are clearly seen, while one of the four silhouettes of the figment is difficult to decipher due to them possibly holding an object, such as a blanket floating around their body in the air. Additionally, the mirrors do not reflect a clear image of the individuals seen with the mirrors. The reflection seems to exaggerate the profiles of the individuals.

Within the broader landscape of the image, the natural elements that surround the location include: sand, dirt, rock, grassed hills on the distance (far right of the image) and cliffs at the center (being seen in the reflection of the mirror), a body of water, and clouds. Tire marks appear along with the light tones of a blue to match the sky and a small fraction of yellow light that slightly appears as the result of sundown. When zooming on the right side of the image, part of a street sign [attached to a larger body of metal pipes] stands clear. Within the reflection, one sees a cliff. This cliff or rock statue is formed with different patterns and colors on the top half portion and stacked gray-brown rocks on the lower portions. Some of the colors include maroon, tan, brown, light pink, orange, light blue, green and red that curve around the body of this rock/cliff. Lastly, above this rock, two floating items above it appear, even when zooming into the image the item is difficult to distinguish.
Image Two: “Re/flecting the Border”
Evaluate

Invisibility

Within the theme of invisibility, a subtheme emerged which I call, the process of being unseen. Through this theme, I consider how photography captures the actual process of the art in the making. While capturing the process of painting, the border highlights the name of the piece, “erasing the border,” it simultaneously highlights the process of being unseen. Bringing invisibility to a physical limitation brought visibility to the multiple layers at play, thus creating a lasting effect of division through a multitude of layers beyond this geographical restriction. Art on the U.S.-Mexico border makes a portion of the border wall invisible by manipulating perceptions, creating a facade of invisibility that communicates more than what is seen or unseen. In these particular examples, the facade brings visibility to a larger discourse. Drawing attention to its invisibility simultaneously renders it more visible.

The process of Being Seen and Unseen

Within, Image One: “Borrando La Frontera, Erasing the Border” artist Ana Teresa Fernández erases the border, emphasizing a greater narrative that demonstrates a process of being unseen. Not being seen is a strong narrative surrounding the U.S. and Mexico border both currently and historically. Names such as “the tortilla curtain” (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011) and the physical intrusion of the many layers of physical barriers created over time created a narrative of the U.S.’s unwillingness to see the other side and those it affects. The physical border is not a single issue; it is layered and its repercussions of such a divide affects beyond its geographical existence. The process of being unseen, stresses the dehumanization tied to barriers. A wall stands in the way of individuals’ ability to be whole; it creates gaps in families, it hinders the individuals
understanding of one’s full self. Additionally, the process created obstacles within the system and does not leave access to needed resources and so much more. All these restrictions play a role in the process of being unseen even if one crosses the border successfully.

The artist adds another layer or being unseen/seen through physically centering herself in her work. Through the process of creating art, Fernández embodies resistance by fully immersing her brown, female body as part of the art she creates. She appears (through photography) dressed in a mini-fitted black dress and high heels while dissolving the visibility of the border wall with her paintbrush. Simultaneously communicating invisibility and visibility. In various Western cultures, some understand the color black to symbolize death, morning, loss, or anger. Growing up, cultural superstitions within my family tied black to bad omens, thus viewing the color as a form of darkness. In her past work titled, *Erasure and Foreign Bodies* (Fernández, 2017) Fernández called attention to femicide, human abduction and human violence. In border work, she incorporates the color black, hyper feminine apparel (stilettos/dresses) and integrates forms of invisibility to draw attention to social and political matters. Hence, Fernández’s black attire and heels communicates more than simply being over-dressed to go paint the border. Thus, I argue that the color black symbolizes this notion of mourning, a recurring theme that highlights the erasing of brown bodies’ both in life and death in connection to borders such as being border crossers or victims of femicide along the border region.

The tightness of the dress implicates her body as part of the border. Fernández use of black speaks of death. At the same time, the color of a black dress and brown skin
matches the unpainted portion of the borders. In the midst of erasing the border using the colors of white, and blue, her body still upholds an illusion of a portion of the border still visible in the mist of her painting. Thus, it emphasizes that the border is upheld by brown bodies and not solely tall brown, rusted, steel pillars. Additionally, her body’s position does not allow a view of the subject’s face which one interprets, not as a specific identity to one woman, but an identity that can represent the countless women deemed invisible through femicide, through violence, and the collective discourse that surrounds women’s lives along the border and/or crossing it. Fernández art also communicates a sense of identity loss along the border and after crossing it. The border continues to be a layered process both, physically and systemically. There are many barriers one must cross even after entering the U.S., including the loss of self, family, homeland, and occupation.

Specifically, the use of her shoes adds another layer of visible and invisibilities by having one heel above the sand and the other buried and planted underneath. As stated previously, at first glance, the shoes present a façade of the artist stretching on her left leg to paint rather than her right foot buried in the sand as she paints. Though the shoes can complete a higher feminine look, one can presume that the artist would assume that she would sink into the ground. The half-buried heels communicate the bodies planted and buried along the border in order for it to function. Specially, the invisible female bodies lost at the border due to femicide are made visible through a narrative shift that emphasizes the idea that the border arises to protect specific bodies while failing to emphasize the bodies that it hurts. These created paradigms dismiss the reality of borders and femicide are also emphasized within the Gaspar de Alba’s (2005) book, Desert Blood: the Juárez Murders. Within the book, Gaspar de Alba utilized the notion of the
outsider both metaphorically and physically living in the border state of El Paso. This lived experience highlights the ability to be forgotten along the border. “I’ve always said people lie to themselves in this town, . . . People like to pretend they can cover the sun with one finger, while the truth is shining all over the place” (Gaspar de Alba, 2005, p.31). This metaphor underlines the failure to acknowledge the true occurrences by looking the other way to avoid or dismiss others realities such as femicide. While Fernández’s work emphasized the forgotten lives along the border by erasing it within Image Two: “Re/reflecting the Border” ERRE and Margaritas piece communicates visibility on both sides of the border through the use of mirrors. Although the photo only demonstrates the reflection and does not include individuals standing in front of the camera, but rather behind, does not depict a reflection of viewing oneself in the mirror but rather balances an idea of individuals already living on the other side.

This piece reminds me of a poem written by Luís Valdez and Domingo Martinez Paredes titled, In Lak’ech. This [Spanish and English] poem that calls upon the Mayan greeting (Lak’ech) which means I am you/you are me. In a few sentences, this poem expresses that whatever harm, love disrespect and or respect that I do onto another person, I do on to me. One understanding of this piece remains a call for humanity with the use of a mirror that reemphasizes the meaning of the Valdez and Martinez Paredes poem. These mirrors create an illusion of a portal that allows individuals to exist on both sides, as a part of both worlds, a third space where they exist simultaneously, depicting an understanding of the saying of “el otro lado” and its community. While there are symbols that may indicate on what side the art is created, the illusion of invisibility reemphasized of one side being on both sides gives a visual meaning to, “you are my
other me”. Additionally, the landscape’s reflection also emphasizes that the same physical space, also the same means a huge disruption of the reflected landscape being reflected. Therefore, it creates the same notion of being the same on both sides of this division. As a result, both pieces call for a greater understanding of that seen and unseen at the border by creating a form of invisibility.

**Facade**

*Romanticizing the Border*

The next theme that I highlight is *façade*. Within this theme came the subtheme, *Romanticizing the Border*. The artists create a façade within their art pieces as a form of illusion. Through my analysis, facades have greater meaning within the U.S. dominant narrative of, “the land of the free” and opportunity. Fernández’ statement to use stilettos and mini dress can represent a form of hyper femininity and femicide. Another interpretation from this statement includes the idea of a false storyline around opportunity that plays a part in romanticizing the border. A dominant U.S. ideology of the “American Dream” indicates suffering ends on the other side. One finds a new beginning in the upward mobility and fulfillment by securing a piece of the American pie, while denying the social economical, language, gender, class, and various borders individuals still have to cross in order to attain the “American Dream”. All these metaphors and national ethos remains part of a discourse that has long centered around the falsehood of making it to “el otro lado,” the other side. This narrative downplays the danger, or fails to include dangers, and the harmful reality that one experiences when crossing the border. Additionally, this discourse, neglects to acknowledge the many metaphorical borders individuals must cross after entering the U.S. For instance, individuals who cross as
doctors lose their status of being medical practitioners due to license restrictions. As a result, the idea around a melting pot holds true that many contributing societal aspects can seize to exist and previous forms of status, education, and at times respect melts away in a beautiful facade of a melting pot.

The second art piece, “Image Two: Reflecting the Border.” Within the theme unseen and seen, I found that the reflection of mirrors used at the border emphasized the idea of brown bodies belonging and existing on both sides of the border. Discourse supporting the implementation of a wall, added layers, funds to militarize, and migratory policies have been centered around establishing safety and protection for the livelihood of “Americans”. An agenda that trickles down to patriotism and a form of nationalism romanticizes immigration. This xenophobic act is covered in patriotism while simultaneously targeting brown bodies on both sides. Thus, this geographical boundary, created for the safety of the U.S. American people as a whole, creates a façade of safety for specific U.S. Americans supported by fear and racial politics. Hence, whiteness benefits from the implementation of a border because it normalizes criminalization of brown bodies. Thus, the facade demonstrated and/or created through border facade artwork is far beyond the physical falsehood of a non-existent border, but stretches to the façade of the American Dream and romanticizing who it keeps safe, while also neglecting to address the amount of lives lost at the border. Though it is not clear what side of the border these installations were created on by looking at the image itself, details within the art pieces might give an idea of the location.
Transforming National Borders

Symbolism

This next theme, *Transforming National Borders*, view the representation and transformation of the two geographic locations within the photographs. Multiple subthemes originated in hopes of understanding a deeper meaning of what is being communicated along the border. These symbols include numbers, colors, landscape, objects, militarization, audience, and the author’s notes, were viewed in order to determine what side of the border these installations were created on. More importantly, this section examines how symbolism communicates and demonstrates transformation of national borders through the use of art by creating a facade of invisibility.

Within Image One: “Borrando la Frontera” not much stands out within the images scenery to indicate which side the artwork was created. Therefore, I analyze the deeper meaning of the symbolism within the artwork. Fernández’s image shows her in the process of painting a section of the border. Not all bars are fully coated, thirteen bars remain in the process of being painted. The number thirteen appears important to the U.S. as it indicates amount of the original colonies within its history. Moreover, these thirteen colonies remain impactful as thirteen is symbolized through the amount of red and white stripes on the U.S. flag. These stripes are replicate within the photo as Fernández colors thirteen train tracks. One interpretation of this symbolism calls out colonialism while simultaneously reclaiming a landmark by erasing colonial markers of land ownership. For this reason, this symbolism also suggests that highlighting and/or referencing the thirteen colonies would illustrate the artist’s attempt to send a message to U.S. Americans who know this history. Therefore, the audience and location on the U.S. side of the
border emphasizes a necessary message to the U.S. side and those who are in charge of maintaining the wall.

Moreover, within her TEDTalk, Fernández (2017) presented the artwork explaining the historical context of the border on the U.S. side and the location of the mural. In addition, she stated that during her process of creating her mural, Border Patrol intervened in her session and debated rather if they should arrest her or keep allowing her to paint. After about a forty-five-minute debate, they understood the metaphor she aimed to create and allowed her to continue her work (Fernández, 2017). Fernández communicated her vision, and the overall performance intrigued Border Patrol given her hyper femininity performance of wearing a fitted black dress and stilettos (Fernández, 2017). As a result, I wonder if her performative art piece could reach completion or if she would encounter an arrest had she wore something less feminine or looked like someone who might try to cross. Her attire stands out-of-place in a hostile environment where no guarantee exists for survival.

Within “Image Two: Re/Flecting the Border,” more objects contribute to this art piece that symbolizes different aspects to consider understanding on which side the artist created their work. A lot of the landscape seen within Image One also exists in Image Two, such as, large bodies of water, and gravel. From these landscape details, one might assume that ERRE and Margarita created this art piece near the same area as Fernández’s piece. Apart from the landscape, other details come into play that might suggest the creation of the image is on Mexico’s side. The sarapes stand out. Sarapes symbolize both Mexican and U.S. American identity, specifically highlighting a third space for Mexican and U.S. American identity. For myself, I wore a sarape when graduating to offer tribute
to both Mexican and U.S. American identities. While sarapes symbolize two cultures, traditionally their colors each represent something. Particularly within my community circle, engaging in the celebration of *Dia de Los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), sarapes symbolized specific traits, identities, and characteristic that tie back to life.

For example, the color green is known to symbolize life, white has been seen to represent purity, and purple sometimes symbolizes loyalty. In Western culture, these colors can represent different meanings. Individuals recognize green as a number of things or beliefs such as money, envy, or the ability to recycled, (these colors are seen more on the right side of the table versus the left). The placement of the blankets and how the tie to each side of the table remains unclear. Its reflection of the mirror can represent the symbolism of what the wall can mean with regards to the color green. On the other hand, the reflection can demonstrate a symbolism for cleansing, reclaiming the space by breaking bread, or simply seeing one’s self on both sides. While some of these symbols and the visibility of signs near the border, emphasizing a need to militarize might lead to the interpretation of the photo’s location being on Mexico’s side. However, an article notes the creation of this instillation was implemented near Fernández mural in friendship Park (Artsy, 2017).

**Communicated**

*Trauma and Resilience, the importance of photography, and Painted in brown*

After analyzing these images, both separately and in comparison, to one another, artists reveal important communicative meanings. Thus, I focus on three important subthemes: (1) trauma and resilience; (2) the importance of photography; and (3) the border is made up of brown bodies. In this theme, I take into account every overarching
theme and subtheme to emphasize the communicated subject to answer my original research question; what is communicated by creating a “façade of invisibility” through art on the U.S.-Mexico border?

Trauma and Resilience

Trauma is very much part of the reality of the border, communicated within Fernández’s work through the use of invisibility, façade, and transforming of national borders. One witnesses trauma placed on women’s brown bodies at the borders through hyper femininity, the color black, and the ability to be planted within the soil so effortlessly. False romanticizing of the border that represents patriotism masks humanitarian issues along the border. It dissociated those voting in favor of maintaining these inhuman divisions through private detention centers, border militarization, and family separations. For these reasons, the process of being unseen is layered, it is at the hands of those who implement migratory policy and who use words to dehumanize transnational citizens with the use of “alien” immigrants, bad 

hombres, drug dealers and rapists. These descriptors then become normalized through the use of hateful and hurtful discourse, that play apart for a need to create and maintain ICE facilities, humans in cages, and border walls that capture brown people as prisoners through the views of train track bars.

As a result, these structures play a substantial role in minimizing the pain and suffering of those who lost their lives at the border, deal with the heartbreak and mental suffering of separations and invest in more resources to continue to militarize the border versus paving a path to citizenship: Artist also illustrates trauma through an artist needing to place mirrors up to create a reality of accessing the other side, to eat with their family,
and to see themselves on the other side. This stance to abnormalize a physical border by the illusion of what a world can be without it communicates a position to destabilize the normalization of borders, not just the physical borders but all aspects of borders, such as, physical, metaphorical, emotional, and spiritual. These borders persist through paperwork, with a two-year review process for DACA recipients with low educational retention rates, low wages, higher health problems and less health care resources. This affects access to housing, credit, jobs, education and so forth. While these traumas remain very real, we still find resilience.

Resilience

Resilience communicate within these images and artwork by capturing the landscape and including natural forms of life such the tabled seaweed within the fence and large bodies of water. Water symbolizes life; therefore, life persists at the border just as much as death. Capturing the warmth of the sun on the beach (seen in Image Two) displays the ability to see beauty in a place that holds so much death. Additionally, the performative act to eat dinner (within Image Two) also illustrates resilience through the idea of nurturing, producing, and celebrating life at a place where many appear forgotten, unseen, and killed. It carries a notion of life still growing in these places. We still live despite these borders. Though resilience remains apparent, it still does not minimize the residual trauma that brown bodies carry, nor in any way does it eliminate the multitude of borders brown bodies experience within their lives, both physical and institutional.

Additionally, it is noteworthy to add the authors purpose for the inclusion of a table in Image Two. The table serves as part of the greater performative act of the art piece. Margarita and ERRE’s notes indicate that though their art piece includes the usual
components or objects utilized to gather for a meal such as, a table and spoons, it does not “aim to satisfy corporeal hunger, but rather to provoke dialogue, or even engender disgust. . . and reminder on a small scale, of the surfeit of consumption” (Margarita, 2017).

*The Importance of Photography*

The artist communicated the importance of photography. While the artwork of each artist tells an important story, the story’s reach would remain limited without digital photography. Artists capturing multiple images of their art piece communicate a process, seeing the performance of painting the border. It was about the process of seeing and how an area could appear without borders, how it could look as individuals prepare to come together and eat, while also capturing brown people as artists who hold the power to erase borders and create a façade of community in a place where it once existed. Capturing the transformation of possibilities remained important because it told another layer of a new narrative.

Without the use of photography, the process would not be captured nor reach its audience and, therefore, would not communicate further than the militarizes land of forbidden crossings. Individuals would not benefit without being present at the exact location at the exact time of the art’s creation to understand the full performative piece. Through the utilization of photography, they captured the process of their art to share with the masses and kept the story progressing. Painting a facade of invisibility allowed others to imagine how a beach could appear when borders are eliminated, what the U.S. could look like without borders, and how it ruins not only the beauty of nature, but the lives that are affected by this division. By creating an illusion of invisibility, the art brought attention
to the actual façade of safety, of nationalism, and racism that built the U.S.-Mexico border wall through a rhetoric of fear. The art provides space for others to challenge the view at the border, to question the absence of those not seen, and the reflection as a larger narrative of the border. Thus, artists created work for those with a limited view or engagement with the border. Without photography these pieces, metaphors, and the performative process would not be documented, shared, or seen.

Painted Over in Brown

Lastly, creating a facade of invisibility on the border reveals the subject artist painted the border in brown, highlighting the brown bodies of which it consists. In both images, bodies appear to engage with the space of the border. There are various aspects within Image One that transforms the border as viewed the ways that brown bodies carry the trauma and symbolism that the border represents both physically and metaphorically. Fernández demonstrates this by centering herself and being purposeful with the demonstration of both her body and attire. Another interpretation of wearing a black dress and capturing her brown body standing out in the section of light blue paint emphasizes the metaphor that brown bodies comprise the border. Her small body frame, able to fit between the emptiness of the bars and the combination of her stilettos being buried in the sand, also demonstrates the practice of trapping, burying, using, and forgetting brown bodies along the border.

On the other hand, in Image Two, mirrors visualize how the space can appear without borders. The mirrors also demonstrate brown bodies being reflected onto and a part of the border. Unlike Image One’s display to paint the borders from the top to bottom, in Image Two, the wall remains visible above the extended mirrors, these placed
mirrors act as an extension of the bodies architecture as they hang on ten of the borders pillars. According to one interpretation, the bars and division have not completely vanished, but rather suggests that this division is more than steel pipes. The artist uses the mirrors to reflect the material of the border demonstrating that is composition is made from brown bodies. Bodies that are humans, living breathing communities that experience death on the border far more than life and communion. Therefore, artist painted over the border in the brown lives it effects, and these restrictions still exist within the U.S. through our physical being and color of our skin. These borders do not stop at the geographical line but carry into everyday lives of being Brown in America.

This chapter highlights prominent occurrences demonstrating four themes: invisibility, façade, transforming national borders, and communication. While more interpretations occur within each image, they contribute some perspectives into the importance of visual discourse, political art, border art, and photographs as texts within the previous decade not been previously focused. In the next chapter of this thesis, I address the importance of utilizing a decolonial framework and analyzing visual discourse, limitations, future directions, and closing words.
Figure 1: Coded Images Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images</th>
<th>Image 1</th>
<th>Image 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colors</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Vibrant colors of blankets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brown/ dirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sky blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warm orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>6 People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Later</td>
<td>6 Blankets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wire fence</td>
<td>6 Blankets within reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wire code</td>
<td>Table (made of wood for the body and mirrors for the tabletop)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pillars</td>
<td>Mirrors (looks like a diffusion of four along the border and two more on the table)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wired fence</td>
<td>Additional reflection of 2 more of the table on the other side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heels</td>
<td>Pillars of the border</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paint brush</td>
<td>Border</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two boxes</td>
<td>Wired fence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>People (maybe 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 spoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clear reflection of over 20 spoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Only soup spoons,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No plates, no ague, no nothing being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>served,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Distance of the reflection something appears to be floating/flaying in the air above the hill/cliff rocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape</td>
<td>Empty/ secluded</td>
<td>Mountain/ cliff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand</td>
<td>mountain/cliff seems to have Colorful drawn objects or holds diffract color shades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body of Water/ocean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tire tracks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gravel</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City in the distance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four pillars only painted on the bottom of the left side</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foggy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foggy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foggy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motion</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman stretching to paint, has paint brush in her right hand</td>
<td>People seen in the distance and an illusion of being near the border through a reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secluded area</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table stands alone facing the camera</strong></td>
<td>And individuals behind the table appear to be on the other side “el otro lado”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection of the border spoons and landscape within the table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slight hint of light pink/ orange color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It takes work to dismantle something</td>
<td>Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Invisibilit</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process of being unseen</td>
<td>The process of being seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am the other side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both sides are the same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>US</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palm Trees</td>
<td>The signs that are seen on the other side of the gate maybe the US given its use of signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City in the distance</td>
<td>Reminding that the U.S.- Mexico border communicates a narrative of protecting specific bodies, and its history is the US creating the border vs Mexico creating the division between itself and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico makes me believe the photo is being taken from the Mexico side of the border</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palms Trees</td>
<td>Sarape blankets are a well-known design in Mexico.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City in the distance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police bodies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parts that are secluded</td>
<td>Secluded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That its tall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Communicated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograpy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework: Landscape</td>
<td>Framework: Portrait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border pillars each captured 20</td>
<td>Border pillars each captured 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates again that art such as murals and installations have power to communicate, to spark change, demonstrate resistance and resilience by reclaiming spatial ideologies through the production of visual subjectivity. Additionally, this research aims to add to layers of visual discourse by validating the role in which digital photography, plays in the process of transforming borders. Through digital photography the act of resistance captures and holds the capability to share art beyond the physical location of where it was created and produced. While the act of painting a façade of invisibility emphasizes an embodied vernacular reproduction of spatial ideologies, it is through the act of capturing and sharing these images through media outlets can result in us representing spatial beings. Thus, photography can transform space and place beyond the physical border region. These important aspects also demonstrate the understanding and use of that visuals as a form of text, with the potential to bring true change with the use of a decolonized lens.

Images do not solely serve as an aesthetic to interpret subject matter regarding marginalized issues. One should view art and photography through multiple lenses, frameworks, and models (such as, decolonial frame, plant-based identity model, Chicana lens, Mestiza consciousness, and critical reflexivity) as they initially become developed through multilayered struggles, lived experiences, and generational memory. Within her work, Gaspar de Alba argued that including Chicano artwork in museums without the reproduction of Chicano views, thoughts, and employment within art exhibitions in order to create change does not remain sufficient. I argue the same regarding other insufficiency to analyze visual texts, border art without the reflexivity of what borders
mean, how they are reproduced, and how they are being transformed on the physical geographical line. Thus, when visual discourse is credible in its ability to communicate something and when the lens of artist takes into account, we become “both makers and viewers destabilized the art world... we are part of the visible world” (Gaspar de Alba, 1998, p. 4035) and that is the process of the unseen being seen.

Through my analysis, I found that what is communicated by creating a “facade of invisibility” through art on the U.S.-Mexico border emphasizes layers of borders (metaphorical, physical, emotional, and spiritual) and oppression. A process of being unseen if layered deep enough it becomes easy to cover. The photographs communicated that the physical stance of the border normalized historic inhuman acts that tie back to death, violence, colonialism, trauma, falsehoods of romanticizing false opportunity, and the “American Dream”. Thus, creating a facade of invisibility challenges these norms by demonstrating that borders do not have to exist, and they shouldn’t, because they are made at the expense of brown bodies, while simultaneously communicating resilience, resistance, and the process of dismantling barriers.

In this thesis, informed by theoretical understandings of space and place, emplaced vernacular, mestiza conscience, place-based identity, transnationalism, political art, visual discourse and communication studies, I have analyzed images of artwork created on the U.S.-Mexico border between the span of 2011 and 2017, focusing on two images created in response to migratory policies and further militarization of the border. While border art is researched from various perspectives, there is a gap in the research regarding border art translated through digital photography. Art magnifies by crossing various outlets, audiences, and channels through the use of digital media and social
Platforms, unlike in the past. Thus, I looked at digital images produced on the border to understand communication through façades of invisibility on the U.S.-Mexico border. Artists added a visual layer to an ongoing narrative surrounding immigration policy in the U.S. Border artists used the contested, constitutional border zone to challenge the power dynamics and discourses set in place to traumatize brown bodies.

I pull from scholars who argue that visual discourse plays a part in understanding culture and utilize Gillian Rose’s (2001) visual discourse method that supports her theory that images alone do something, “image is at least potentially a site of resistance and recalcitrance. . .” (Rose, 2001, p.10). This study utilized a portion of her four-part visual analysis phase while also adding a fifth phase that provides a decolonized lens. When analyzing a visual, a key step within Rose’s (2001) method is the interpretive process. This process asks to forget all previous perceptions with the material in order to engage a new meaning. However, with a decolonial Chicana/Mestiza consciousness, it is important to take into consideration the original vision of why these photographs were captured and the reason behind each artist’s creation, given its political context. It is dangerous to ignore the context of resistance, given that this resistance was formed in response to the injustices that surround the border due to migratory polices. We cannot strip away the original political context of the spatial artwork produced, because when we do, we ignore issues and the people demanding to be seen.

By adding a Chicana lens and a decolonial framework, I found four overarching themes and six subthemes that addressed what is being communicated through a façade of invisibility on the U.S.-Mexico border. Once again, the results reiterated how rhetoric of anti-immigration produced by spatial arrangements such as a border reinforce the
discourse of American patriotism, as seen in the work of Carillo Rowe (2004). In addition, border art communicates trauma, resilience, and the importance of photography. Both art pieces captured a process of a performative act that told an important story. Without the use of photography, individuals would need to watch the artist in the process of painting to understand the deeper discourse involved in the artists’ projects. Through photography, one experiences the process of art being seen, shared, and lived beyond the moment when it was created.

Therefore, this research strives to validate the use of visual discourse and the need to decolonize the process of current methodologies in order to reflect political visual discourse and resistance in a meaningful way. By doing so, we have the ability to dismantle even the metaphorical, emotional, and spiritual borders that live beyond the physical. We can critically reflect on how structures created in whiteness limit or erase the process of art, photography, and resistance. We must actively question the origins of where methods were rooted and how the broader field could benefit from adding a decolonized framework and/or lens.

**Limitations**

Key components within this study that contribute to the larger field of communication and visual discourse, however I want to explore and develop this research study further. I am grateful to engage with border art, imagery, and the power of photography within this study in ways that I had yet to accomplish in the past. I am grateful for the transnational artists who shared their work with both the broader public and myself. I also reflect on the ways that this work could continue to grow in the future. In terms of my sample size there is always room to include more artists and/or images.
Specifically, within this study I could have added multiple images captured by the artists in order to demonstrate various frames and sections of their art piece and performative demonstration. While the two images I used demonstrated nuance, power, and resistance, utilizing only one frame of an overall shoot is limiting. Thus, adding images has the potential to expand a narrative, give a different representation of the artist, the piece, and the storyline.

In keeping with an evolving storyline, another limitation within the study did not include the voices of the artists themselves. While reading articles, background information, and viewing videos surrounding these border art installations remained helpful and needed, I believe the study would benefit from a personal interview. For instance, a different interpretation of the artwork in this study might occur by guiding a specific set of questions to engage with the visual layer added around a larger migratory issue. In combination with a deeper understanding of the artists’ own personal engagement with the border, presidential administrations, and their views on how social media and photography played a part in their work.

My own lack of engagement with the physical location and space of the border remained another limitation in this study. I believe my interpretation and perspective of my current work might differ had I situated my body within the physical space of the border. Nonetheless, this is why art on the border and the power of imagery is particularly important by allowing me to engage and possess a sense of connection to an area recognized only with fear prior to this research study. Growing up in a state not connected or near the U.S.- Mexico border, and being raised with the narrative that our family left Mexico for a reason, played a big part in the conversation that nurtures fear of
“el otro lado”. Through this study, I now understand that the trauma situated at the border is substantial, that in many ways that fear manifest itself in a multitude of ways that influences identity, belonging, and perpetuations that lingers within my own family.

Even though I know beauty resides on the other side; this border physically represents a space of limbo, an invisible area where dehumanized brown bodies linger. However, it is through art, that these artists created a new narrative that captured the border through their own lens, which finally allowed me to see the continued physical manifestation of a border that is reoccurs in my everyday life - metaphorically, emotionally, and spiritually. At the same time, the art created space to find resilience where trauma is eminent. One other limitation of this study included the lack of engagement with art created during the duration of this project.

Both art pieces remained important to address and discuss but engaging with a project in real time might add another form of nuance to my current project. For instance, in November 2019, artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer illuminated the skies of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez with his project titled, “Border Turner,” was created on the U.S.-Mexico border between Texas, and Chihuahua. This binational art unified individuals on both sides of the Rio Grande. Created to focus on border enforcement, Lozano-Hemmer connected a microphone to searchlights. Once someone from both sides spoke into the mic, they turned a small wheel that controls a set of beams, and when both users’ lights intersect in the sky, a two-way channel opened up, allowing them to communicate (Falk, 2019). When taking into consideration current art installations, it is apparent that some of the limitations within this study consisted of not engaging with border art in real time, and only looked at art created in response to U.S. policies rather than focusing on art
created solely from a human stance of connecting. Furthermore, the art created on the border of Texas might differ from the art created in California as presented within this thesis. Subsequently, it is also noteworthy to add both the resilience and trauma layer that might fall under Lozano-Hemmer’s piece, following the tragedy of the El Paso shooting. Therefore, it is important to look to actively engage with current art projects and look at the different interpretations of artwork created on different parts of the border and by other artists.

**Future directions**

Various transnational artists have engaged with the U.S.-Mexico border, including French artist JR. In 2017, JR created an art installation piece along the U.S. and Mexico border titled, “Giant Picnic“ the goal of this installation strived to share a meal with individuals on both sides of the border (California, United States and in Tecate, Mexico). JR took a photo of the eyes of a “Dreamer” and used it as a surface/place mat from which individuals could eat. Through a word of mouth initiative, JR shared the same food and water with hundreds of guests (GianAlter, 2017). I find it interesting how this geographical divide has impacted even some of the remote places of the world. For this reason, I think it’s essential to also investigate artists such as JR who also add a visual layer around the communication of borders and how it impacts individuals globally. JR’s piece may also communicate a deeper understanding of plant-based identity with regards to ever changing borders and how they speak volumes across the work. In addition, a look into how audience might differ as JR largely centered his piece on crossing both sides of the border and required transitional individuals on both sides of the border to come together to create its work. Lastly, the angle of the photo also
communicates a different perception of the border as the photo is captured from an above angle adding a different view and technique in comparison to my current sample.

Therefore, seeing how the broader community engages with border art might also provide an important future direction. This begs to question if the same themes occur, would the art have the same intent or impact form a French artist vs a Chicano or Mexican artist? Hence, future work considers the opinions of how interpreting this artwork by others, such as creating a focus group to introduce the understanding of the work by others and the audience for which it was created. Many different types of groups might benefit when trying to understand the communicated data. Focus groups could include individuals from both Mexico and the U.S. to further understand their perceptions of the border to determine if the same themes are being communicated on both sides.

Another focus group can include feature individuals who engage with the border, identify as border crossers, or who lived on the border versus those who have yet to engage with the physical location of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Another future direction may include creating an art piece on the border with a community of artists and/or participants, to collectively come together and decide what visual layer they would want to add as a collective to contribute to border art. They can do so by performative art pieces or creating other examples of installations that also create a facade of invisibility on the border that evolves into taking photos of the art piece or creating a video of the time lapse of the art produced and allowing individuals to interpret that art creating process via a focus group. For myself specifically, I would like to engage with the border physically and capture art along the border to understand other told stories, see others who draw on the border, experience various forms of art materials,
and examine the border at different points along the bordered (both through the U.S. and Mexico).

While I have addressed future directions and highlighted areas of improvement, I in no way, try to negate the efforts of the project, but simply believe this is simply one more step in the direction of validating visual discourse and specifically validating the art historically created on the border and to work toward documenting future contributions and other voices. Apart from the restriction of the location of art analyzed within this study, individuals with higher education backgrounds created these pieces; thus, status can play apart in the availability to access the needed resources to complete each project. In addition to resources, the selected artists are well-known, suggesting their reputation and expertise added to the images ability to go viral. Therefore, I believe a future direction would benefit by centering the art influenced by the border in different ways than those who are currently reflected within this paper, including myself. While I pull from my own experiences and validate my past degrees of Mexican-American studies, I must also validate the experiences and the knowledge of individuals who engaged with borders in ways I never have before, who may have a different perception of art being created on the border entirely. Thus, I must give space for those points of view and acknowledge the potential harm in engaging with such a space in a performative way when these images have the power to spark various reactions including pain. While social media possesses power to share images in hopes of influencing a trend in order to reach those that have power to change laws, it may also trigger difficulties for others while in the process. Thus, while we highlight these needed conversations, we must also consider the weight that this carries for others in the process.
Self-Reflection

This was a difficult but rewarding and valuable process for myself. I am truly grateful for the artists willingness to share their work with me for this project, and not only allow me to do so, but to email me back during a pandemic and during mass demonstration protests surround the Black Lives Matter Movement. Therefore, I not only want to thank them for sharing their work and for engaging art at the border knowing the trauma that it holds. I acknowledge the countless borders requiring to be crossed mentally, emotionally, and spiritually in order to accomplish such tasks. Thus, while I acknowledge the difficult process for each of these artists and appreciate their efforts, I must also acknowledge my own. While I have engaged with Chicanx and border history in the past, it was essential to obtain a deeper insight to respectful honor what has been established within Chicanx history in connection to the border.

The realities of the history of the border, the pain it causes, the death that surrounds it, and the mass deportations it emphasizes, is still only a fraction of this ongoing colonial history. Deportations continue to grow even during the wake of a global pandemic. As I write this sentence, countless migrants go on to be detained and families stay separated. Not even a respiratory pandemic has halted this inhumanity. In many ways, the unlivable conditions within ICE facilities have worsen. Reportedly face masks are confiscated as they are viewed as contraband within ICE facilities. In addition, individuals are being sprayed with chemicals harmful surface chemicals to stop the spread of COVID (Lopez, 2020).

There are so many layers of this injustice that needs to be seen and spoke of, and while the physical U.S.-Mexico border needs to be addressed, borders affect mind, body,
and soul. Personally I faced countless obstacles as an academic and a brown body navigating spaces not intended for people like me. While I have not experienced the constraints of the physical U.S.-Mexico border myself, I have resided on boundaries all my life, crossing where I was not designed, and creating art along the way. We demonstrate resistance by being border crossers and becoming unapologetic international citizens. The ability to live on the line, exist on the line, and flourish on the line is how we generate our third space. Thus, this research is necessary.

Visual layers show resistance and resilience because they communicate emotion, tying nonverbal language together. As a first-generation Latina in academia, I received my fair share of borders to cross. While in grad school, I sometimes feel as though I am living in another country. Upon my acceptance into graduate school and sharing the news to my father said, “Nicole, you are in a whole other world. You have surpassed all of us beyond what we can help.” In fourth grade, I distinctly remember sitting on the living room floor with my math book on the coffee table and my father on the couch writing on my notebook, showing me long division. For a large period, fourth grade math was the most recent memory I had of him participating in my schoolwork. Until I decided to pursue a degree in Mexican American Studies. My studies introduced conversations surrounding my culture and childhood. Discussing lasting urban legends such as, La Llorona, and cultural icons and notoriously known films within Mexican-American cinema; such as, Selena, La Familia, and Blood In and Blood Out. When I told my father about my reading poetry written by the same man who produced Blood In and Blood Out, he bought me the movie to watch. If only I can put into words, the significance of this monumental moment for myself.
For the first time, I did not feel worlds apart from my family in connection to education, validating Chicano visual culture and lived experiences made me whole. My studies broke down a barrier for me. The ability to use visual elements and discourse as resistance allowed me to connect my worlds. Visuals include the power to create a third space. The use of photography for our own story creates the power to connect and restore us. Consequently, it is important to consider the use of a decolonial lens when examining visual discourse as it provides the tools to break institutional norms.

**Conclusion**

The trauma that brown bodies carry and the pain that brown bodies hold has always remained prevalent. Tangible spaces allowing us to rest our grief or validate our storyline within broader U.S. history did not always remain possible. However, we process our reproduction of *Cultura* (culture) during unbearable moments of dehumanizing acts. We are finally seen when we create a façade of invisibility through our music, dance, poetry, art, and imagery. It is the act of resistance of taking the very spaces meant to keep us buried and paint over them in order to transform transnational boundaries that challenges the public to rethink borders. Lastly, when we utilize photography to create these transformations, we capture resistance through our lens, and that is the power of visual resistance.
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