

Space, Place, and Cultural Visibility: Barrioization and Barriology in Mario Suárez's Short Stories

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Background

- Mario Suárez (January 1923–February 1998) represents a unique case of an early mid-twentieth Chicano writer, essayist, novelist, educator, and activist who created a distinctively Chicano literary space. Preferring to be concise and meticulous, a perfectionist, he was more interested in human character than pure craft. Born and raised in the Chicano barrio of Tucson, Arizona, and as the first writer to use the word “Chicano” in print, Suárez stands as a trailblazer for embracing this invisible community with compassion, sensitivity, and empathy from which he would create his short-story literary project.
- In *Chicano Sketches: Short Stories by Mario Suárez* (2004), edited and published by Francisco A. Lomelí, Cecilia Cota-Robles Suárez, and Juan José Casillas-Núñez present eleven published short-stories along with eight others from the archive of Mario Suárez's unpublished work. As the editors note, “The publication *Chicano Sketches* is long overdue. Universally recognized in the Chicano short story field for his trailblazing efforts, Suárez has been a pillar in its development and evolution” (149). Through this collection, the editors exemplify Suárez's sincere commitment to barrio literary explorations as the spatial hermeneutic to Chicano political agendas.

Research Objective

- This study has two aims: (i) recover Mario Suárez's pre-Chicano movement writing as a precursor to Chicano writing and (ii) to demonstrate how his fiction creates a “barriological” intervention against the U.S. spatial practices active in barrio life which have “placed” Chicanos in the material and symbolic geography drawn by the visible hand of urbanizing capital (Villa, 2000, 4).

Three-Part Research Questions

Part I:

- How do Suárez's short stories represent the barrioization effects in the El Hoyo neighborhood in Tucson in the 1940s?

Part II:

- How do Suárez's short stories serve as a barriological intervention against the effects of Tucson's historic barrioization?

Part III:

- In what ways do Suárez's representations of El Hoyo barrio mirror the dominating social and spatial practices and accelerated urbanization that have shaped the ever-sprawling urban Southwest?

Critical Concepts

“Barrioization”

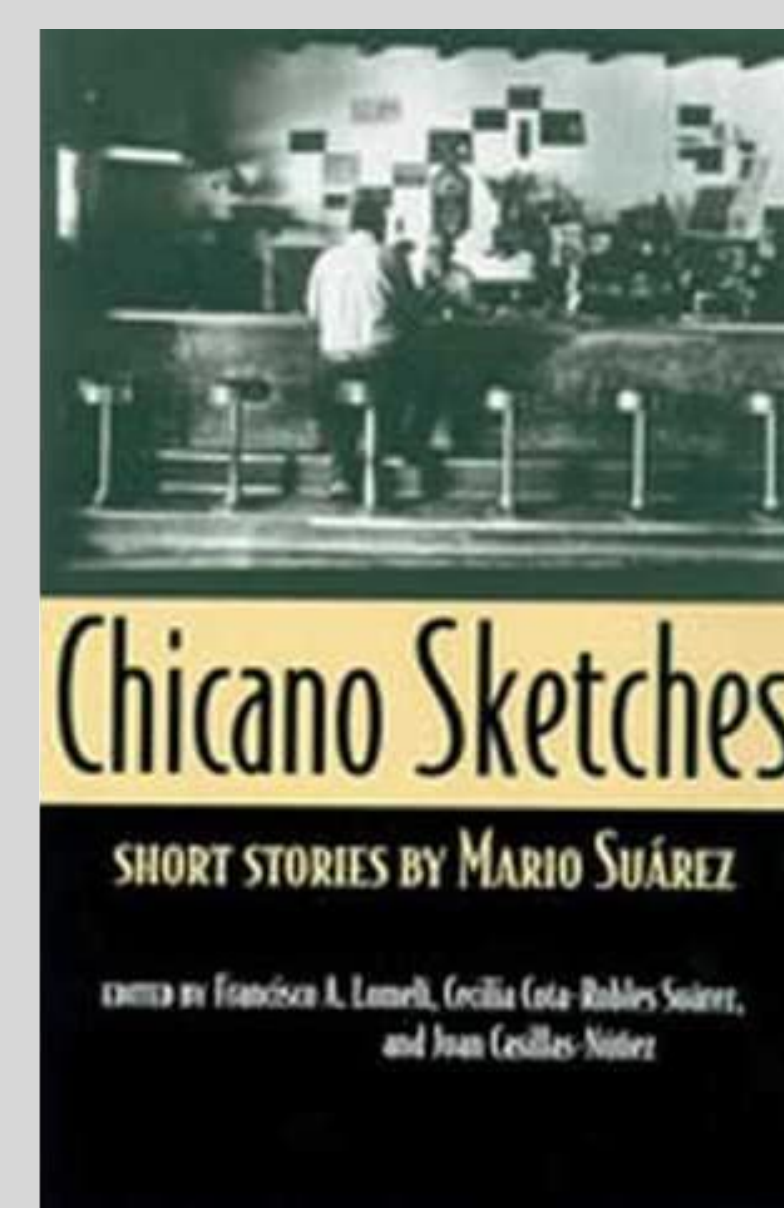
- “the formation of residentially and socially segregated Chicano barrios or neighborhoods” (Camarillo, 1979, 53, original emphasis), “barrioization — understood as a complex of dominating social processes origination outside of the barrios” (Villa, 2000, 4).

“Barriology”

- “an ‘anti-discipline’ that subverts the totalizing impulse of dominant social space containing the barrios... a tactical ethos (and aesthetic) ... ever engaged in counter point to external barrioization” (Villa, 2000, 6).
- “The linguistic hybridization of the Spanish root barrio with the Latin suffix logos, combining and juxtaposing Chicano popular associations of social space with the elite connotations of academic disciplines” (Villa, 2000, 7)



An image of today's Barrio El Hoyo. (William Self Associates, Inc, 2007.)



“El Hoyo”

Original Publication: *Arizona Quarterly* 3, 1947.

- “He set out to fictionalize and re-create such a place of ignored characters because he believed their human story was worth telling, and he hoped that the American literature would eventually include them or at least recognize their existence” (Lomelí, 2004, 1).
- “Sirviéndose de las vecindades chicanas de Tucón, Arizona, como fondo, Suárez expresa la vida y milagros de algunos personajes típicos del barrio. Mas su realismo se distingue del de sus coetáneos por la fuerte añoranza del pasado y por el firme sostenimientos de la validez de nuestro modo de vivir” (Rodríguez, 1973, 9).

- “From the center of downtown Tucson the ground slopes gently away from Main Street, drops a few feet, and then rolls to the banks of the Santa Cruz River. Here lies the sprawling section of the city know as El Hoyo. Why it is called El Hoyo is not clear. It is not a hole as its name would imply; it is simply the river's immediate valley” (Suárez 11)
- “Perhaps El Hoyo, its inhabitants, and its essence can be best explained by telling a little bit about a dish called capirotada. Its origin is uncertain. But it is made of old, new, stale, and hard bread. [...] While in general appearance it does not differ much to another, it tastes different everywhere. Nevertheless it still capirotada. And so it is with El Hoyo's chicanos. While many seem to the undiscerning eye to be alike, it is only because collectively they are referred to chicanos. But like capirotada, fixed in a thousand ways and served in a thousand tables, which can only be evaluated by individual taste, the chicanos must be so distinguished” (Suárez 13).