



Assemblages of Land Loss and Immigration in Film and Literature about the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

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Abstract

Recently many scholars portray identity politics and environmentalism as incompatible, or analyze the two in ways that marginalize immigrants. Assuming that immigrants should have a right to land and a protected environment as well, this article explores how creative media can interact with political theory to explore land, ecology and identity. Literature and film that are relevant to a concept of land and immigration that promotes ecologically sustainable and anti-racist visions are analyzed here to create an assemblage, based on Deleuze and Guattari's theories. This is done to accomplish three tasks. The first is to disrupt misconceptions of a dichotomy between ecological activism and immigrant rights activism. The second task is to address the connections between ecologies and immigration and diaspora communities while taking into account issues of control over land that have often been important to people who immigrate from Central America and Mexico to the United States. As a third task, the idea of assemblage is modified to integrate Marx's theory of primitive accumulation and Laclau and Mouffe's idea of discourses of positive and negative activation in discourse to explore Deleuze and Guattari's theory through a more specific application to situations of political economy that have been so intertwined with immigration, land, and ecology in Central America, Mexico, and the U.S. Southwest. Accordingly, the aim is to illuminate ecological points of view that are from immigrant and diaspora communities, rather than hostile to or imposed upon them.

Keywords: Ecology, immigration, land, U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

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Introduction

This article explores how written and filmic images of rural places create consciousness that inspires transnational disruption of spatial practices of racism against Chicana/os, Mexican and Central American people. In particular, what violent cartographies—ways of privileging the nation state and forgetting internal national violence, such as racism¹—sustain international oppression and how, from a perspective informed by Deleuze and Guattari's theories of assemblage, can cultural expressions of land loss and ecology come together as an assemblage that breaks habits that sustain domination? This article argues that film and literature about the borderlands can create an assemblage of images about land to illuminate three things: 1.) ethnic and racial difference; 2.) differing types of political relations created by an ethnic conception of land; and 3.) a flexible, yet politically powerful, divide between oppressors and oppressed necessary for activism.

To do so, this article will critically analyze fiction including Marcos McPeck Villatoro's *A Fire in the Earth* (1996), Carlos Fuentes, *The Old Gringo* (1985),² and America Paredes' *George Washington Gomez* (1936/1990) as well as films on immigration such as Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958/1993),³ Roy Germano's *The Other Side of Immigration*, (2010)⁴ and Gregory Nava's *El Norte* (1983). This analysis will look at important short written passages and film scenes to show what visualizations of ecologies exist and how they may be capable of illuminating how: (1) immigration and (2) land and ecology affect each-other in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Nonetheless, this article will not be an attempt at a comprehensive typology or explanation of all the literature and film on the subject, but rather a collection of scenes from film and passages from literature that enable an assemblage which opposes dichotomies between ecology and immigration.

The theoretical and conceptual approach this article uses combines Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory with Marxist theories. Accordingly, this article outlines the concept of migration and ecology in Karl Marx's theory of primitive accumulation from *Capital*⁵ to set the stage for a debate of political action and discourse/aesthetics. This helps to theorize connections between (1) ecology and landlessness on the one hand and (2) immigration on

the other because the initial impetus of capital is the dissolution of rights to communal land and subsequent migration to cities by subsequently landless people. The loss of land first among Mexican-Americans following the U.S.-Mexico War and more recently among Central Americans follows a similar pattern of rural to urban migration and immigration from communal lands. The term ecology is mentioned since these migrants and immigrants often had more ecologically sound agricultural practices, albeit in different kinds of media expression, for hundreds of years⁶ which were disparaged with resulting ecological destruction. There are a number of problems with taking Marx's 1867 theory and applying it without modification to current times. Therefore, this article also looks to more contemporary theories. This article thus juxtaposes Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's 1980 theory of assemblage Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theory of how discourse can be used to specifically pinpoint oppression and thus inspire movements away from oppression. These two theories balance out each-other because Laclau and Mouffe's theories provide a rigid divide oppressors and oppressed which Deleuze and Guattari's theories of assemblage avoid. However, Deleuze and Guattari's theories of assemblage can also be at times vague about political direction, which Laclau and Mouffe's theories can correct, as does the specificity of landlessness and migration present in Marx's ideas of 'primitive accumulation.'

Historical Background

This article deals with three separate areas that have been brought into contact through the U.S. wars, both hot and cold, as well as landlessness brought along by U.S. imperialism. This process begins in 1848 with the U.S. annexation of ½ of Mexico and subsequent violation of land treaties. This forms the backdrop for the initial idea of the loss of land where Mexican-Americans who suddenly became U.S. citizens without immigrating to the U.S. lost land grants which had been guaranteed by the Spanish and Mexican governments as beyond the realm of saleable private property. This unfolded at different speeds in New Mexico and California between 1848 and 1945. However, the consequence of this in culture and activism intensified from the mid-1960s as the Chicana/o movement gained momentum.

Important Historical Events	Dates	Countries
Land Grants (Spanish)	1692-1821 ⁷	New Spain (in current U.S. Southwest)
Land Grants (Mexican)	1821-1846	Mexico (in current U.S. Southwest)
U.S.-Mexico War	1846-1848	United States, Mexico
<i>Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo</i>	1848	United States, Mexico
Loss of Land Grants	1848-present	United States (in current U.S. Southwest)
Mexican Revolution	1910-1920	Mexico
Chicana/o Movement	1965-1980s	United States (in current U.S. Southwest)
Increase in Mexican and Central American Immigrants	1965-present	United States
Increased Landlessness in Mexico	mid-1970s	Mexico
U.S. Interventions in Central America	1980s	El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala

Conflict over land in the borderlands occurs in the context of a clash between Latin American communal concepts of land and English ideas that land can be bought and sold,⁸ the latter becoming dominant in North America. However, not all forms of communal land in Latin America were egalitarian. Latin American communal forms of land ownership were often by inheritance as well as oppressive labor structures in large estates in Latin-America called the *Latifundia* system. Yet, in Central America, the loss of land has led to large scale emigration to the United States. Even less oppressive land grants in northern New Mexico⁹ or *acequias*¹⁰ (Spanish-Mexican, communally managed irrigation ditches in arid parts of northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado), were on land stolen from indigenous people or given to help Mexican settlers fight against various Native American peoples. Nonetheless, the change from communal lands for both Mexicans and Native Americans in New Mexico after 1848 was part of “primitive accumulation” as the U.S. took over New Mexico at the end of the U.S.-Mexico War.¹¹

During the 1970s and 1980s the United States and U.S.S.R. intervened in civil wars in Central America to support capitalism or communism respectively. The most important result is that

indigenous peoples who lived off the land, much like Mexican-Americans mentioned above were forced to immigrate to the United States, often as undocumented immigrants. Worsening land relations and economic situations also forced Mexican peasants to immigrate in increasing numbers to the United States, which increased in the 1970s.¹²

The above historical issues are related not just by geographical overlap, involving the U.S.-Mexico border in the U.S. Southwest, but also conceptually by the intensification of landlessness. They also are depicted in a variety of creative expressions by and about Latina/o and Chicana/o immigrants which are the subject of this article. Moreover, these depictions often do not occur in any sort of chronological order, either within various cultural artifacts, or in their publication. Chicana/o Park, created in 1970, in San Diego for example contains murals about Mexican mythology, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), junkyards in the neighborhood (roughly the 1950s), and undocumented immigration (1965-onwards).

Theory

The factual context for this article is the above loss of land and the social, political, and ecological consequences. The context in the academic literature stems in part from recent divisions between ecology and ethnicity¹³ and the simultaneous upsurge in Marxist theoretical interventions in the relationship between land loss and ecology on the one hand and class struggle and socialism on the other hand. Both strains of literature offer something, but miss something on the present study which analyzes the positive interplay between class, race, and land. There was not one particular concept that explained both the political-ecological consequences of land loss and the potential for film and literature to depict it in all its complexity. Therefore, three theories were combined (see table 2).

By the loss of land, I am not referring to actual disappearance of land. As Derek Hall explains, this could only happen if land was flooded by the ocean.¹⁴ The notion of land loss is a concept derived from Karl Marx's primitive accumulation concept whereby people who had rights to use communal land, informal or not, suddenly lost this and were forced into migration to cities in England or elsewhere.¹⁵ This term has been used to describe Native Americans

and Mexicans in New Mexico after the U.S. annexation of Northern Mexico in 1848 into what is now the U.S. Southwest.¹⁶ Though to refer to it simply as loss of land may obscure the real issue: loss of traditional and/or indigenous sustainable practices of growing crops or irrigating land. Thus, land loss here does not cover a land grab which is when a capitalist entity takes over large areas of land owned by another capitalist entity.¹⁷ What is at stake is also not the ability to farm one's own land using money remitted from immigration and/or using non-traditional, non-sustainable methods.¹⁸ Thus, land loss in this article is not about any loss of land, but the loss of indigenous and/or traditional sustainable use of land and how it may influence internal and international migration.

It is known that migration and immigration have occurred after the type of land loss mentioned above. This is not simply by applying Marx's theory, but also through various historical and theoretical studies. However, the amount of influence of land loss or why and how people migrate is debated. In the 1990s, The New Economics of Labour Migration approach used statistical analysis of rural Western Mexican residents who immigrated to the United States to determine that: a.) it was 'plausible' but not yet proven that land loss, rather than land acquisition, influenced emigration to the United States;¹⁹ and b.) that residents of Western Mexico from 1988-1995 actually came to the United States to earn money to buy more rural land.²⁰ These studies nonetheless do not pay attention to the reform of Mexican communal lands, *ejido*, in 1992 which made it possible to work these lands absentee or sell them as commodities and do not discuss how other forms of land policy and agricultural subsidies which helped small land-holders in Mexico retain their traditional farming and provided economic and political stability.²¹ Secondly, in Southeast Mexico, following the commencement N.A.F.T.A. in 1994 many indigenous people farmers in Oaxaca emigrated to the United States because their agricultural products could not compete with U.S. corn imports to Mexico.²² This followed 20 years of neo-liberal economics which were forced by the Mexican government and caused large scale emigration in the 1970s²³ as well as such rural, indigenous immigrants emigrating to the United States rather than to Mexican cities in the 1980s.²⁴ Another issue with such studies is that they assume individual or family choice after such large-scale state interventions to render traditional

agricultural impossible. While this model is commendable for analyzing how migration may spread land, which contemporary scholarship on land-grabbing may ignore,²⁵ The New Economics of Labour Migration approach also ignores the consequences of war in Central America where migration may have been less of a choice as well as the rise of organized crime in Mexico and Central America which has rendered most places unlivable which has caused large scale emigration to the United States. Thus, the loss of land is less explainable through individual or group choice. It has been impacted by a variety of large-scale government programs, economic liberalization, and government corruption which in many cases does not provide the choice to stay on one's own land, at least by using traditional, ecologically sustainable agriculture methods.

Loss of land to a certain extent suggests a fluidity of identity away from traditional rural identities. This is relevant to contemporary immigration in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands which is also affected by primitive accumulation²⁶ and persistent extra-legal and courtroom conflict over this loss.²⁷

This reference to a specific subject is useful for explaining specific events and provides a model for what could be done with Deleuze and Guattari's theories that offer holistic examples which sometimes seem too broad to apply concretely to narrower political situations where power operates with greater specificity. From Marx's perspective capital operated by creating illusions based on false distinctions which obscure the monetization of peasants' land (including resources located there) and labor and new dependence on industrialists.²⁸

To some degree, the focus on one-group while ignoring the other—for example, Latinos not indigenous peoples—has been part and parcel of mainstream Marxism. By creating a departure from the economism of much of Marxist theory by acknowledging that class should not be the only privileged site of revolution,²⁹ Laclau and Mouffe also theorize the contingent antagonistic nature of creating protest and revolution without resorting to dichotomous ideas of unchanging identities. This improves upon apolitical interpretations of Deleuze's work³⁰ as does an encounter with Marx's work.

	Primitive Accumulation	Assemblage	Discourse of Positive and Negative Activation
1. Discusses Loss of Land	Yes	No	No
2. Discusses Migration	Yes	No	No
3. Discusses Inequality	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Discusses Positive and Negative Possibilities of Revolution	No	Yes	Yes
5. Teleological	Yes	No	No
6. Geographical Area	U.K.	Western Europe (mostly)	Europe/ America

Deleuze and Guattari's theories of assemblage are crucial here in that they enable a more nuanced view of land loss and ecology. The assemblage is used here to illuminate how ecology is both positive and negative. As Patricia Pisters explains: "In a Deleuzian approach, these images do not have one fixed meaning, but they always need to be reconsidered and related to their specific assemblages. Thus, they can construct different aspects of subjectivity that are 'materialized' in the image."³¹ Within assemblages, Abstract machines create images based on a future and continuous change rather than a represented reality³² which explains the use of the Mexican-American past in a way that does not so much retell history, but depicts history, land-grants, etc., to force a better future. This lack of retelling is political because it forces what Simon O'Sullivan calls 'encounters' which differ from the forces of conservatism that we are constantly fed by the state and media.³³ Moreover, Deleuzian scholarship illuminates the fluidity of identity³⁴ which partially explains the changing names for, aspirations and political affiliation of the Chicana/o and Latina/o people mentioned in this article.

Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory is applied to both film and literature in this article. Others before me have done this in a variety of ways including: 1.) using assemblage as a purportedly more culturally appropriate method for global cinema than the time image,³⁵ 2.) using assemblage theory to explain variability and Deleuze's cinema book to explain cinematic style,³⁶ and 3) showing how films can link together different things.³⁷ The fact that this article does not focus on Deleuze's cinema theories, such as 'time-

images,' does not imply a critique but rather that this article utilizes assemblages to think through a situation with historical, cultural and legal complexity and difference.

Simply contrasting the environment as a setting for human drama can be avoided by focusing on cultural practices more local to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Gloria Anzaldúa foregrounds elements of the natural world into a conception of the borderlands.³⁸ Similarly, in regards to the England-Wales borderlands environment, Raymond Williams looked at how human life and the environment were always interspersed and that politics could not escape this.³⁹ He often wrote novels because of their ability to discuss politics in ways that were never fixed and had multiple meanings.⁴⁰ This is not an antithesis to human action, but rather enables the oppressed to gain power. This dovetails into post-Marxist ideas of discourses transfiguring subordination into oppression (the latter being potentially opposable by immigrants) and domination (opposable by their allies).⁴¹ Williams' writing style also functions as an assemblage, in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari use the term, by eschewing fixed essences. Yet, how might this theory become praxis?

Creating an encounter between Deleuze and Guattari and Laclau and Mouffe's theories moves the latter beyond standard one-group identity politics toward intersectionality by creating an "emergence of the multiplication of minoritarian struggles, in the analysis of the conjuncture which Deleuze carries out, takes over from class struggle" while "transforming" these struggles.⁴² The term minoritarian does not mean ethnic or racial minorities based on percentages, but rather in contrast to the dominant group, that is the "majoritarian" who is "a constant and homogenous system" whereas "minoritarian" is "a potential, creative and created becoming."⁴³ This expands the realm for protest beyond simple oppressor/oppressed dichotomies based on distinctly definable ethnic and racial groups or social movements.⁴⁴

Laclau and Mouffe offer a conceptual framework that locates an assemblage within applicable radical discursive practices. For example, they point out the need "to identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, directed toward struggling against inequalities and challenging relations of

subordination.”⁴⁵ As a result this article will use the term “environment as positive activation” to explain places where “relations of subordination” can be named “relations of oppression” and subsequently “relations of domination” that are more likely to be disfavored and consequently fought against.

Laclau and Mauffe’s theories of discourse are taken up, partially because of their similarity to Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of assemblage being both positive and negative, and also because of their idea that discourse has both potentially negative and positive political implications in tangible terms. In other words, the films and literature analyzed here both use images of environments as a positive enunciation and a negative enunciation of immigrant rights. Thus, they do not create a standard Marxist reading of primitive accumulation as the path toward proletariat revolution. In some cases land loss can be seen as having negative implications, poverty, subject to harsh racism, and/or death during undocumented immigration to the United States.

Land and Identity Assemblages in Film and Literature

For the most part, authors and directors usually were successful people who procured corporate and/or governmental funding or stable jobs. Distribution was not usually done on a grass-roots level as it was with certain Chicana/o newspapers in the 1960s. The radicalism inherent in these texts is therefore more in what they speak of, e.g. against landlessness, racism, and how they do so, rather than in their means of production or distribution. Thus, production usually occurred at a distance from the violence of the subject matter. Films and literature (including poetry) were chosen based on their ability to show: (1) the positive potential of land loss; (2) the negative potential of land loss; or (3) a combined positive and negative potential of land loss. Yet, how there could be a positive or negative potential in depictions of land loss requires conceptual explanation?

Treating the natural environment as a background is the simplest way to understand its role. Simultaneously, it may be difficult to prove that authors and directors intentionally include natural landscapes. Yet, it also is grounded in a modernist, European novelistic idea of literature as expressing something human rather than natural, which Romantic poetry opposed.⁴⁶ The environment

partially functions as a backdrop for dramas about immigration such as *Touch of Evil* where the border is blurred with no distinction between the United States and Mexico, *Sin Nombre* where undocumented immigrants ride across a somewhat picturesque Mexican landscape, parts of Gregory Nava's 1983 film *El Norte* where the protagonist hitchhike across Mexico,⁴⁷ and parts of Arturo Perez Torres' 2005 documentary, *Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary* where immigrants are filmed crossing various Central American borders and the national space can only be marked by writing superimposed on the screen.⁴⁸ In this sense, the background is there by necessity. It can say different things, but is largely overshadowed by unfolding human drama. This suggests that while the environment plays a part in immigration and its depiction in film and literature, land is to some extent depicted as passive and unrelated to immigration. This, however, is somewhat false and perhaps more an unintended consequence of films' need for sets and actors; it would be strange to blot out the landscape backgrounds.

In, *A Fire in the Earth*, written by Marcos McPeck Villatoro, a crisp distinction between proletariats and peasants in some analyses of primitive accumulation is destabilized through discourse that both shows the absence and potential of revolutionary actions by peasants, but comes from outside. McPeck Villatoro is an American author and scholar who had lived in El Salvador by choice in the late 1980s and whose mother had immigrated to the U.S. to escape the El Salvadorian Civil War.⁴⁹ While this book is not about immigration and is set in the 1920s, it is included here because it shows land loss which more recently influenced migration out of El Salvador and other Central American countries. This helps understand earlier processes of land loss that are more similar to those in theories of primitive accumulation. This mirrors McPeck Villatoro's position as a U.S. citizen published on a U.S. press that specializes in Latina/o fiction and receives funding from U.S. corporations. Nonetheless, this discourse's revolutionary potential is foreshadowed through traditional references to land. This discourse arrives after the second act of physical violence.⁵⁰ In this case, a dialogue without reference to names occurs. This dialogue thus cannot at this point be simply the emotional reactions of characters. It however is not a narrative either. This places it

within thought contained in speech but not the individual. This divorce of speech from an actual person is discursive because it belongs to nobody. This dialogue questions the peasants about why a baby died, and then why people in the group died. The answers at first can only look at folk remedies to sickness. Then the voice continues to ask them. They can complain about not having land. Then the voice asks why. The people say that someone else owns it and they cannot afford to buy it. This a capitalist discourse, though it contains a kernel of indignation. The unnamed speaker coaxes them out of this by blending a Marxist analysis with their previous experience of communal land ownership: they must take their land back from rich people.⁵¹

Yet, such guidance about how to relate to land may come from within the oppressed community, albeit through forgotten traditional relations to the land. Land also exists as an assemblage closer to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. An example of this comes, in *George Washington Gomez*, first published in 1990 and written in the 1930s by U.S. scholar, musician and author Americas Parades while he was in junior college and working as both a grocery store clerk and journalist.

In school Guálinto/George Washington was gently prodded toward complete Americanization. But the Mexican side of his being rebelled. Immigrants from Europe can become Americanized in one generation. Guálinto, as a Mexicotexan, could not. Because, in the first place, he was not an immigrant come to a foreign land. Like other Mexicotexans, he considered himself part of the land on which his ancestors had lived before the Anglotexans came.⁵²

While, this is tied to someone who ultimately will identify with and become part of the American national hierarchy, it does show a fluidity of assemblages of enunciation. The idea of being from the land and a different ethnicity complicates the assertion of American hierarchy. Though the notion of identity does not guarantee that hierarchy will ultimately be rejected.

The Old Gringo, written beginning in 1964⁵³ by Carlos Fuentes, partially during his tenure as Mexican ambassador to France and first published in 1985,⁵⁴ enunciates Mexican and U.S. land as not simply geographically distant, but technologically, politically, and

socially different. The novel takes place during The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) which was fought partially for peasants to take control of land. In Fuentes' novel images of land elicit ethnic and national identity differences. For example, the protagonist Harriet looks at the border: "...seeing on one side a sun struck suspension bridge and moribund dust; on the other, the quicksilver path of the rails and the blue haze of the railroad station: the casket wrapped in the United States flag."⁵⁵ In contrast to the imperialist calls of the U.S. press to bring "democracy and progress to Mexico" land again is emphasized with identity forming capability: "...what mattered was to live with Mexico in spite of progress and democracy, that each of us carries his Mexico and his United States within him, a dark and bloody frontier we dare to cross only at night: that's what the Old Gringo had said."⁵⁶ Yet this is more of a minoritarian assemblage; Harriet neither fulfills her white, American background nor Mexican subjectivity per-se. She becomes the Other as a result her interaction with the foreign land of Mexico.

In the U.S. scholar Ray Germano's self-funded 2010 documentary *The Other Side of Immigration*, shots of land also portend a notion of Mexican national identity.⁵⁷ This is created by a U.S. film maker but interspersed with narrative interviews about the importance of emigrants to the U.S. to help solidify Mexican national identity. These shots are sometimes scenic, such as panoramas of picturesque Mexican towns (which are supported by remittances by undocumented immigrants). Sometimes they depict relatively empty Mexican agricultural land, or women staying home, in Mexico, to grow food whilst their family engages in undocumented immigration.

In Gregory Nava's 1983 feature film *El Norte*, originally nationally broadcast on television by The United States governments' Public Broadcast Service (P.B.S.), rural and urban environments are portrayed as an inspiration for different types of action. First, the idea of land is important for inspiring revolution against rich landowners.⁵⁸ The camerawork here does not portray land simply as something ordinary. It is animated and lively while workers plan a violent rebellion. To a different extent, the protagonists', Enrique and Rosa's, arrival to the U.S. side of the border shows land that seems magical and inspiring. The view of a

night-time San Diego, California horizon is energetic. It is something out there, to be journey to through physical struggle, in contrast with the night-sky border patrol helicopters whose searchlights technologically scan the ground for undocumented immigrants.

Similarly, in Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*, which was released by Universal Studios with severe edits in 1958 and rereleased with modifications that fit what Orson Welles seemed to have wanted in 1993, urban landscapes take on different moods. When the protagonist, Miguel Vargas, a Mexican District Attorney who is in America observing a corrupt U.S. police investigation of a suspicious death on the U.S. Mexico border, is actively engaged in the search for justice land is light and not foreboding.⁵⁹ When crime is happening or when the local, American police chief is trying to murder him, landscapes are dark, urban, and later, industrial wastelands.

Title	Positive Activation	Negative Activation
<i>De Nadie</i>	No	Yes
<i>A Fire in the Earth</i>	Yes	Yes
<i>George Washington Gomez</i>	Yes	Yes
<i>The Old Gringo</i>	Yes	No
<i>The Other Side of Immigration</i>	Yes	No
<i>El Norte</i>	Yes	No
<i>Touch of Evil,</i>	Yes	Yes
<i>Crossing Arizona</i>	Yes	Yes
'One by One'	No	Yes

Yet, as with some of the novels and films analyzed here, land in film does not always give a stable impression. For example, in *Touch of Evil* American land is supposed to confer safety to Miguel Vargas and his wife as they travel to the Mirador Hotel. However, she is raped in this purportedly safe side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Similarly, in the 2006 documentary *Crossing Arizona*, shots of the desert land are scenic, light, and reassuring with a folk song sung in a female voice discussing immigration.⁶⁰ However, the desert is also portrayed as a desolate site of death for undocumented immigrants and conflict for anti-immigrant militias, which complicates any

essentialized idea of land in the U.S. Southwest as always magical or revolutionary. The idea of the Southwest as enchanted can be seen in various pre-World War II artists such as Georgia O'Keefe. This idea mixes with a somewhat revolutionary stance with the migration of hippies to the Southwest beginning in the 1960s. An opposite, harsher side of land in the U.S. Southwest will be explored next.

In *George Washington Gomez* Américo Paredes portrayed land as an activation of political action, by discussing Chicana/os as the rightful owners of land stolen from Mexican-Americans. However, Paredes also shows the flipside of land and ecology: separation from it occurs as a negative activation. When the protagonist, George Washington Gomez, grows up, he works for the federal government and moves to Washington, D.C. This separation from his land, enables him, in the guise of being an industrialist to spy on his Chicana/o friends and family in South Texas. Similarly, in *De Nadie* the interviews of dangerous lives take place in separation from land—that is urban interiors without attachment to physical landscapes. Likewise, violence takes place in *The Squatter and Don* with the separation from land. This starts from a previously positive association with land.

In immigrants' departure from Mexican and Central American lands to seek work and increased safety in the United States, the desert in the U.S. Southwest is portrayed in a different relation: being swallowed into the earth while dying during undocumented immigration. An example of this can be found in the 2015-2017 United States Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera's "One by One", written between 2004 and 2006 and published by an independent bookstore press, City Lights, in 2007. While the poem does not give exact dates, it is likely that it is about increased immigrant deaths that occurred between the implementation of the 1994 Operation Gatekeeper policy that funneled undocumented immigrants through U.S. deserts and the poem's completion in 2006. The deadly relation between undocumented immigrants and harsh desert lands that they increasingly cross while arriving in the United States is contrasted with environmental beauty and American material abundance:

I am alive
 or am I dreaming
 I am dead they spoke like this
 those figures
 crossing
 deserts across deserts
 notice the flowers and the rivers
 the thin rain and foundations and chickens and town feasts
 the gardens the sky cleans the casas ours the
 dishes of pastries and jellies and salsas and beans....⁶¹

This poem is not anti-environmentalist. Juan Filipe Herrera has explained that rural and urban Californian landscapes influenced his poetry.⁶² It is not backgrounding desert ecologies either; the people have a close, inescapable relation to the desert ecology. It ends with the migrants in coffins; therefore, it suggests that land and earth which cannot be held are hostile and foreboding for undocumented immigrants, though not for other U.S. citizens.

Mexican filmmaker Tin Dirdamal's 2005 documentary film *De Nadie* (which is "No One" in English), made while a volunteer helping immigrants in Southern Mexico⁶³ and published by the Mexican film company Producciones Tranvía, opens with interviews of a woman in an immigrant shelter in Mexico.⁶⁴ As the interviews progress, she discusses her undocumented immigration across the border into Mexico after a hurricane washed away her house thereby intensifying her need to work to support a family with a disabled husband. These opening scenes provide little visual description of any natural landscape. The camera work prioritizes portrait shots of people speaking in front of brick walls or at railroad yards (many Central American immigrants are often seriously injured, killed, or assaulted by gang members while riding a freight train through Mexico toward the U.S.-Mexico border). The presence of built spaces and lack of natural terrain in these is an appropriate place to discuss relationships between immigrant and land and ecology

Similarly, U.S. filmmaker Cary Joji Fukunaga's 2009 feature film *Sin Nombre* portrays Central America as an urban wasteland and foregrounds footage of Mexican rural places as seen by undocumented immigrants riding on top of freight trains. This does

not signal an absence of violence. The protagonist is trying to escape his past involvement with Central American gangs through undocumented immigration to the United States.

The above suggests that land, or ecology is not a magical setting that guarantees wellbeing for immigrants. Rather immigrants' relationship to land can turn from beneficial to deadly, much like a fast-moving summer storm. Moreover, it contradicts Marxist ideas that loss of land is a stage in the creation of the proletariat. If such a future stage is to exist it is not automatic in these novels and films. However, the presence of gender—a minoritarian position in the borderlands—suggests room for seeing how the negativity of being separated from the land could be turned into something more positive as well. In *Fire in the Earth* violence takes place in an attempt to separate indigenous peoples from their land.⁶⁵ In sum, the absence of control over communal land causes violence. But also, the portrayal of a middle class family who loses their land to foreign capital and then a wealthy land owner was used by Marcos McPeck Villatoro, the author of *A Fire in the Earth*, to explore often ignored gender issues. Romilia, the daughter of an original resident of an *ejidal* (communal land) called El Comienzo in El Salvador has a daughter named Rosa while fleeing an earthquake that destroys a large city. She marries an outsider, Patricio, who buys formerly communal land to build a brick factory. After he dies, purportedly of suicide she loses this house to Joaquín Reyes who builds a large fence around it. Reyes takes an interest in Romilia's daughter Rosa and Romilia forces Rosa to marry him after he purportedly kills her boyfriend. Later, Rosa and her brother Paco who turns into a revolutionary will be murdered by counter revolutionaries. After Reyes's death, the house however reverts ownership to Romilia, who uses it to save as many residents of El Comienzo as possible from the right-wing violence. The peasants are subsequently able to use Romilia's property which should have been their right again. Therefore, the assemblage here shifts from extreme hierarchy in landlessness to something in between with Romilia and her daughter Rosa beginning to live a less hierarchical life (though not completely).

Conclusion

Deleuze and Guattari's theories of assemblage—the idea of motion of subjectivity and enunciation—provides not just opportunities for minority struggles to take part in class struggles (which Laclau and Mouffe had already done). Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblages also allow minoritarian politics to multiply beyond simple notions of subjectivity based on class and ethnicity that both leave open blind spots of oppression from within, especially in regards to each other. This comes through a variety of ways of portraying relationships of immigration to natural places and the category of landlessness. The literature and films analyzed in this article portrayed environments as a setting that activates anti-oppression thought and movements or conversely as a backdrop for death, in Felipe Herrera's poem "One by One," that can be used to express the harshness of undocumented immigration in ways that may create discourses that challenge what Laclau and Mouffe characterize as accepted subordinations.

Assemblages of ethno-political difference of immigrants, in comparison to mainstream, White America, have been constructed in texts analyzed here utilizing imagery of land. This can occur in clearly stated ideas of people of Mexican descent being from the land in Texas, whereas Caucasians are not, in *George Washington Gomez*. It also occurs negatively in Juan Felipe Herrera's "One by One" where undocumented immigrants have a deadly relation to land as they cross deserts during undocumented immigration. It can occur with an absence of any relation to land in *De Nadie*. It can differentiate national spaces that immigrants come from as fundamentally different from the United States in *A Fire in the Earth* and *The Old Gringo*.

At the same time, these images do not quite leave behind the idea of class. Undocumented immigrants and landless people are working class. Yet, their identity is broadened to include the idea of ethnicity and/or non-U.S. national identities. This may be because of Cold War politics that dissuaded and discredited activism along these lines, it may be because of the American New Left's movement away from class based Marxism, or it may be because of the violence that followed in the wake of the demise of Central American revolutionary politics. The reasons are beyond the scope of this

article. Nonetheless, these different identity groups are determined in a way that resembles class, especially when considered in comparison to Marx's idea of the metamorphosis of peasants with rights to communal lands to landless migrants (after "primitive accumulation") to disempowered urban laborers to leaders of an anti-capitalist revolution. However more than 160 years after the end of the U.S.-Mexico War, there mostly seems to be disempowered rural and urban Mexican-Americans or assimilated immigrants that are less interested in overthrowing the capitalist system.

Assemblages of land also designate different types of political struggle and investment in radical change. In *Touch of Evil* assemblages designate political engagement or political/police violence against Latina/os. Similarly, assemblages activate political struggle by landless peasants against elites in *A Fire in the Earth*. Images of land are used with song lyrics to inspire consciousness of undocumented immigrants' struggles in *Crossing Arizona*.⁶⁶ Similarly, in *The Other Side of Immigration* assemblages of land designates a need for political, cultural, and ethnic solidification of Mexican national identity for émigré in Mexico. Yet, the above assemblages do not function to create a discursive antagonism that can be fully articulated using a dichotomy of us vs. them.

Assemblages are another way to express what Laclau and Mouffe were discussing with discursive hegemony. However, the concept of assemblages may account for the blurring of right and left that Laclau and Mouffe fear, but in a way that relies less on a dichotomy of antagonism versus cooperation. Deleuze and Guattari's eschewing of dichotomies allows another way of thinking about politics, based on the potential to move toward both positive and negative directions regardless of original intent or form. This is far more appropriate for the borderland where such fluidity has typically been part and parcel of identity.⁶⁷ On the other hand, this is not to discredit antagonism or other findings of Laclau and Mouffe. For their work may provide more coherence to a political project of action, that Slavoj Žižec⁶⁸ argues to be easily missed in Deleuze's work.

For Laclau and Mouffe part of creating hegemony is asserting an antagonism of "us" versus "them." To some extent this may be necessary for political action. A strength of Deleuze and Guattari's

work is that with this, there can be antagonism, but us versus them may be more “democratic” to borrow Laclau and Mouffe’s term because the “us” and “them” can change in their theory of assemblage. This enables further understanding about how the privileged site of “us,” the revolutionary may become “them,” the hierarchy. An example of such a situation is how Marx created a revolutionary idea of merging land, capital, and migration all the while expressing a paternalistic British imperialist attitudes toward Irish-émigré. To this Laclau and Mouffe might add expanding Marxist struggle to include other oppressed peoples— for example Irish émigré in Marx’s times and immigrants from Mexico and Central America in contemporary times.

While it is beneficial to prioritize expanding analyses of social class to include ethnic identity, racial identity, and social movements, there is a need to do more than to designate various ethnic groups as also important. In borderland identity politics, ethnic and racial identities often include other identity groups, gender, and indigenous peoples who have sometimes been oppressed not just from dominant oppressive groups but also from within oppressed groups. Many of the texts analyzed here engage with this problem by illuminating how the oppressed can become oppressors too; George Washington Gomez transitions from a revolutionary Mexican-American family background, rooted in pre-United States relations to land, to a U.S. government agent spying on his own people; Central American gangs attack Central American undocumented immigrants in Mexico in *Sin Nombre* and *De Nadie* and with the assistance of Mexican police in *Wetback: the Undocumented Documentary*. Yet, *A Fire in the Earth* also shows how these contradictory people may create a prelude for, if not revolution, revenge against the oppressor from oppressed people who have gone over to the side of the oppressor. Literature and films are able to add to social science discussion by engaging with these complicated open-ended identities.

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Notes:

1. Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies*.
2. Fuentes, *The Old Gringo*.
3. Welles, *Touch of Evil*.
4. Germano, *The Other Side of Immigration*.
5. Some of the many recent discussions of Marxist theory and the environment include Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology*; Burkett, *Marxism and Ecological Economics*; and Perreault, "Dispossession by Accumulation?"
6. Toohey, "Changes in Representation of Environmentalism in Latina/o English Language Media in the U.S. Southwest."
7. Westphall, *Mercedes Reales*, 7.
8. Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 23-24.
9. Ebright, "New Mexican Land Grants," 17-23.
10. Gunn, "Aesthetics as Commons," 81-92.
11. Dunbar-Ortiz. *Roots of Resistance*, 6.
12. Roberts, "China's 'Tidal Wave' of Migrant Labor."
13. Hultgren, "The 'Nature' of American Immigration Restrictionism"; Cafaro and Staples, "The Environmental Argument for Reducing Immigration to the United States."
14. Hall, *Land*.
15. Marx, *Capital*.
16. Dunbar-Ortiz, *Roots of Resistance*.
17. Hall, "Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by Dispossession and the Global Land Grab."
18. Massey et al., *Worlds in Motion*.
19. Massey et al., *Worlds in Motion*, 105.
20. VanWey. "Land Ownership as a Determinant of International and Internal Migration in Mexico and Internal Migration in Thailand."
21. McCaughan, "Mexico's Long Crisis toward New Regimes of Accumulation and Domination."
22. VanWey, "Land Ownership as a Determinant of International and Internal Migration in Mexico and Internal Migration in Thailand."
23. Roberts, "China's 'Tidal Wave' of Migrant Labor."
24. Jonathan Fox, "Reframing Mexican Immigration as a Multi-Ethnic Process," 40.
25. Hall, "Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by Dispossession and the Global Land Grab," 1590.
26. Dunbar-Ortiz, *Roots of Resistance*.
27. Correia, *Properties of Violence*.
28. Marx, *Capital*, 909.
29. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

30. For critiques of Deleuze and Guattari's works along these lines see Zizëc, *Organs without Bodies*, and Lenco, *Deleuze and World Politics*, 5-6.
31. Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture*, 5.
32. Zepke, *Art as Abstract Machine*.
33. O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters*, 156.
34. Rizzo, "The Alien Series."
35. Martin Jones and Brown, *Deleuze and Film*.
36. Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture*, 47.
37. O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters*, 150-151.
38. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*.
39. Harvey, *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference*, 26.
40. *Ibid.*, 28.
41. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.
42. Sibertan-Blanc, "Politicising Deleuzian Thought, or, Minority's Position within Arxism," 124.
43. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 106.
44. *Ibid.*, 104.
45. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 137.
46. Henighan, *Natural Space in Literature*, 7.
47. Nava, *El Norte*.
48. Perez Torres, *Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary*.
49. "The Official Website of Marcos Villatoro."
50. McPeck Villatoro, *A Fire in the Earth*, 134-135.
51. This point is best explained by Laclau and Mouffes's theorization of discourse. There are people that would appear ready on their own to overthrow the landed elite: indigenous peoples who know how to manage their own land. Yet, as Jessop in *State Power* explains, the nation-state, using discourse, keeps the people in an uneven playing field. As such, the peasants on their own cannot find words to take control of land that was stolen from them. They can only speak of buying it back, a hopeless endeavor. However, an outside discourse, provides words for an indigenous revolution: the people need to take back, not buy, what was stolen from them. At this point the reader has been provided no information to know from who or where this Marxist discourse arose from. At this point, the potentially revolutionary peasant receives a consciousness capable of mobilizing them into insurrection against those that stole their land.
52. Paredes, *George Washington Gómez*, 148.
53. Sutherland, "Fuentes the Memorious."
54. Guttridge, "Carlos Fuentes."
55. Fuentes, *The Old Gringo*, 186.
56. *Ibid.*, 187.
57. Germano, *The Other Side of Immigration*.

58. Nava, *El Norte*.
59. Welles, *Touch of Evil*.
60. DeVivo and Matthews, *Crossing Arizona*.
61. Herrera, *187 Reasons Mexicanos Can't Cross the Border*, 102.
62. The Poetry Foundation, "Juan Felipe Herrera."
63. IMDb, "Tin Dirdamal."
64. Durdamal, *De Nadie: (Border Crossing)*.
65. DeVivo and Matthews, *Crossing Arizona*.
66. DeVivo and Matthews, *Crossing Arizona*.
67. See Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*.
68. Zizěk, *Organs without Bodies*.

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