

Mapping Identity and N'deé Ethnicity
in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*
and Alvaro Enrigue's *Ahora me rindo y eso es todo*

Trazando identidad y etnicidad N'deé
en *Meridiano de sangre* de Cormac McCarthy
y *Ahora me rindo y eso es todo* de Álvaro Enrigue

ROBERTO LAWRENCE RANSOM CARTY
Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua
roberto.l.ransom.c@gmail.com

DOLORES PRIETO JASPEADO
Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua
lolybj@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Both Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* and Álvaro Enrigue's *Now I Surrender and That is All* take place on the northern border of Mexico and the southern border of the United States, at two overlapping periods in the XIX century. This paper discusses the two perspectives emanating from the border conformation between the consolidating Nation States and how the genocide against the N'deé nation—specifically the Chiricahua group—has been added into the plot of the narratives analyzed to preserve cultural representations of the indigenous nation.

KEYWORDS:
Apache;
Indigenous Nation;
Narrative Analysis;
Mexican-American Border;
Hermeneutics.

PALABRAS CLAVE:
Apache;
nación indígena;
análisis narrativo;
frontera mexicano-americana;
hermenéutica.

RESUMEN: *Meridiano de sangre* de Cormac McCarthy y *Ahora me rindo y eso es todo* de Álvaro Enrigue se desarrollan en la frontera norte de México y la frontera sur de los Estados Unidos de América a lo largo de períodos entrelazados en el siglo XIX. Este artículo expone las dos perspectivas nacientes entre los Estados Nación en consolidación y cómo el genocidio perpetrado con la nación N'deé—específicamente la rama Chiricahua—ha sido adherido en el entramado de las narrativas analizadas para preservar las representaciones culturales de la nación indígena.

Recepción: 28 de abril de 2023

Aceptación: 23 de septiembre de 2023

“Estoy en otro país, eso dicen los mapas,
la historia, o algún otro detalle”

ENRIQUE SERVÍN, “Illegal”

Two historical novels retell the last years of the N'deé persecution in the nineteenth century through different fictional times and viewpoints.

Cormac McCarthy's novel *Blood Meridian* (McCarthy and Meyer, 2002), published in 1985, follows a group of so-called¹ USA migrants who initially participate in Chihuahua's contracts for Apache scalps in the XIX century but mainly just trek illegally as bandits, killing and raiding small villages in Mexico and the newly attached southwestern American states. According to Sepich (1991), Judge Holden, the main antagonist, and the Glanton Gang can be historically verified in Chamberlain's autobiography, which narrates their scalp-hunting days. However, this is the only document where Judge Holden is verifiable as a historical figure. Paradoxically, The Kid, who could be considered the main character, as he is the subject followed throughout the text, cannot be traced to a historical source.

Alvaro Enrique's novel, *Ahora me rindo y eso es todo*² (2018), recently published, offers a counter perspective from the Mexican viewpoint, with the assistance of intertwined brief personal passages of his present-day family road trip to the Southwestern United States, which allows him to insert historical and temporal clarifications. Moreover, the other two narrative voices in Enrique's work are spoken by his fictional take of two historical figures: Zuluaga, a lieutenant colonel in the barely-born Mexican army, and Camila, a fictional name given to Mangas Coloradas's third wife, whom he abducted from a raided Mexican ranch.

¹ The novel groups them together, though many of them would likely not have American citizenship in that century, probably to illustrate the diverse formation of early settlements, consistent with the era, but not socially accurate due to segregation conflicts later developed in this text.

² The title, as explained by Enrique himself, references “Now I surrender to you and that is all” assumed to be one of Geronimo's last declarations, when he was at a conference to negotiate peace with General Crook (Roberts 1994).

The cross point is in their portrayal of what has become the Apache legend in the last years of their struggle to survive colonization; despite the official historical statements made by the American and Mexican governments, their memories and exploits have endured in oral tradition and reshaped the Apache into an almost mythical force. The historical Mangas Coloradas, Cochise, and Geronimo have become heroes in the public narratives because of their tactics, strategic battles, and resistance to their modern States. The Old West, along with its novels and movies (Chávez Chávez 2014), barely recovered the Apache legacy and has mostly portrayed a plain view of the social conflict behind these peoples' lives. Regardless of most biased representations, McCarthy and Enrígue's novels successfully bring to life how violence, territorial appropriation and intercultural conflict are an ongoing social plot in the frontier context.

Blood Meridian, McCarthy's epic novel, has been a source of reference as well as critique; it was labeled by Bloom and others as "McCarthy's permanent masterpiece" (Bloom 2009: vii), and back in 1985, by the *New York Times*, the author's best work as it took great skill "to witness evil not to understand it, but to affirm it's inexplicable reality" (James 1985). When it was attempted to turn into a movie, Professor Douglas deemed it "probably unfilmable" (2018) not only because of the histrionic and narrative challenges it would require to be fair to the book's violence and grotesque images, but also because of its complex religious, political, and social considerations.

This lack of adscription is present in McCarthy's main character, The Kid, who fled from Tennessee at a young age into the West to see the world, portraying both a fortune seeker and explorer who had nothing to lose and a life to gain by daring to go on an incursion into the mysterious region. The antagonist, Judge Holden, is a legend among different literary analyses (Sepich 2008; Masters 1988) given the many complex layers that McCarthy bestowed upon the scenes centered on his actions and speeches: a so-called priest, a military strategist, and a heartless killer are just the outer personas in the character's depiction of law in the barren, faraway West which the author reconstructed.

In *Blood Meridian*, flora and fauna, archeological sites, and natural phenomena are seen with the skilled eye of a naturalist through a mix of authorial knowledge and the perspective of one of the main, if not the main, characters, Judge Holden. It is one of the layers he is made up of. He also participates in the wanderlust, bloodlust, gold lust, and sexual lust of the rest. Still, he leaves most of the heavy work to them, only to step in where his expertise and strange intelligence are necessary for their, and his own, survival. He carries with him notebooks to write down everything of interest to him, and his interests are many.

The Judge's ability to reflect on and inquire about ethical and social conflicts, starting from the questionable assumption that natural selection may be understood as survival and adaptation of the fittest, is what the following reflections will center on.³ As the plot progresses, The Kid is confronted with the Judge's words and actions on various occasions, which mainly teach him that talent resides in being willing to do anything to survive in a situation where the odds are against him. As risky or plainly biased as this statement may be, it does stress an element of analysis closely related to the landscape's depiction. The "frontier as a void waiting to be filled" (Masters: 24) sets for the Judge the role of enunciator of his doctrine, lawmaker, and leader of his creation of reality; but, we add, it also allows for the Judge's reinterpretation of the reality of creation and its purpose, if any.

As they trek through a cultural landscape with centuries-old, shared territory and interaction, the Gang encounters the modern frontiers as a newly established migration barrier. Near the plains of San Agustín, New Mexico, The Judge leads them to camp near ancient Anasazi ruins, and when questioned about the kind of Indians that inhabited the place, he acknowledges them as kind and "not dead" (McCarthy and Meyer: 184);⁴ even when there are only some old artifacts lying around, the Judge infers

³ Another possible starting point could be The Kid at the center, and at opposite poles, the ex-priest as an orthodox Christian vision of creation and man, and Judge Holden as an idiosyncratic gnostic and nihilist.

⁴ The Judge recreates a world of his own in this registry book, such as analyzed by Masters' 'Witness to the Uttermost Edge of the World': Judge Holden's textual enterprise in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, and he is also a source of meaning, according to Taylor (2001). The making of modern identity and the ability to declare what is included

from there a still present reality. In a different tone but in a similar vibe, Enrígue mentions the ruins of Paquimé as an abandoned memory of a Pre-hispanic civilization whose walls remain faded into the scenery, though in contrast to the Apache huts, a different kind of much more perishable homestead, both are to be overtaken. In both cases, there is a certain nostalgia for what came before the conquest and an inferred judgment on the Apache way of life and the truth behind the conquest and civilization.

The Judge labels the native peoples as “ain’t not kind” (McCarthy and Meyer: 184) and barbaric, and then he adds, “the old ones are gone like phantoms and the savages wander these canyons to the sound of an ancient laughter. In their crude huts they crouch in darkness and listen to the fear seeping out of the rock” (189). Those statements are connected by The Judge to a tale in which a traveler is murdered by the greed of a harness maker and how the traveler’s son is robbed of this heritage by his father’s death. He concludes that the way of life in the meridian is where God has become tired and indifferent to a land where peoples come and go. As if showing the inevitability of that fate, he led the Gang members into fearing the place not because of the ghosts of the past but because of the intrinsic quality of the landscape that would favor the most savage among the savages winning in the future.

Foreshadowing the novel’s final paragraphs, which take place years after the Gang’s disbandment, the Kid is killed by Judge Holden on the charge of treason when he refuses to acknowledge the philosophy inscribed by The Judge as he is unable to kill the Judge and betray the other Gang members. Keeping a glimpse of humanity instead, The Kid is submerged into a scenery where he never really becomes an agent in the violence or a willing subject of the atrocities throughout the novel but appears to be dragged around calamity without choice, which is not the case. In fact, he repeatedly chooses to remain as a fellow traveler; secondly, we must consider that he is entangled in a well-knit plot, mostly blamed on the Judge, but ultimately, a matter of everyday violence as an almost ritual creed to prevail in such a context.

in the reality —a simile of Jorge Luis Borge’s *El aleph* (1998)— demonstrates Holden’s judgment about life, death, and what transcends his rule.

The cultural construction of traits of the fittest is a common topic in both novels but disguised in different ways in the non-ethnic characters. At the same time, the native nations are enveloped in the inherited plot of uncivilized and barbaric. This is exacerbated to an extreme in the depictions assigned to the N'deé, who lack even their given name and convert automatically, though comprising diverse branches and traditions, all into Apache. The representations tagged onto the Apache name carried in themselves a judgment, as *apachú* in *zuñi* meant enemy (Almada Bay and de León Figueroa: 3), and thus the mutual recognition of the Other that cannot be assimilated or dominated.

Enrigue, on the other hand, makes it a point to quote Alonso de Benavides to differentiate the N'deé from the rest of the native peoples when the friar called them bellicose, zestful, and aggressive in their manner of speech, as to confirm their manner; however, Enrigue later concludes that for native groups, the Apache couldn't be identified as belonging to any other ethnicity, and "if you were to meet [an Apache] you had to kill him before it killed you" (Enrigue: 25). Even when the author clearly dresses up his antagonist group, there are two worthwhile elements to note: first, the segregation of everybody different as Apache, as enemies, and second, the contextual premise that the survival of the fittest⁵ reigned supreme.

The evident segregation between the N'deé and other tribes was reciprocated. In Enrigue's novel, when the two Yaqui scouts and the two Sonora ranchers finally meet the Apache, they are immediately shot by Mangas Coloradas's men. However, the people from Chihuahua are left alive, including the Raramuri Mexican officer, Corredor, who, historically, lived on to fight next to Colonel Terrazas, prompting the destruction of the last huge Apache camp in Mexico, after which the warriors returned to the United States to negotiate going back to the reservation and the population left behind was forced to hide their ancestry and identity. By including this scene, Enrigue foreshadows the flaw in the Apache ways, their ethical and ritual boundaries for war and violence, which led to their defeat in a lawless land.

⁵ Social Darwinism is a topic in *Blood Meridian* and a recurrent subplot in the Western genre, including Enrigue's novel, which is reinforced by the challenging landscape.

From this viewpoint, The Judge's words make sense, and The Kid is guilty of treason. In a twisted way, McCarthy summarizes an interaction premise that costs lives: obeying or disobeying the Judge's tacit law is a matter of life or death whether the Judge had deemed it so or not. Seemingly, a Calvinist double predestination (Barth 2013) prevails there. Brown's threat to kill Holden with a gun to the head after the Judge killed the innocent child foreshadows the end of the novel, where free will is still dependent on the 'one law' Holden has established. When he warns The Kid that only one of them is to leave alive that night, The Judge reaffirms his supreme knowledge of the territory and seals the inescapable destiny of those who are to live in the Meridian.

This supreme knowledge of the territory —as a barren land, a void, a no man's place, a wasteland— is prefigured by Enrigue as well when he says that nobody knew the extent of the Spanish territories further away from Nueva Vizcaya because few came back or wandered long enough to find that end. The dark mystery with which the author paints the landscape brings back that doomed feeling McCarthy evoked with the Judge's statement of those souls being not dead and the inevitability of someday being part of them. The territory described in both novels makes it clear that there is a spiritual element beyond the subject's will or property.

Indeed, the territory had long been populated and configured by different cultural and ethnic traditions in interaction, which Manuel Orozco y Berra (1864) documented in his work studying the ethnic groups of Mexico for the Second Mexican Empire with Maximilian. The document covers the cultural diversity of the territory even before the independence and, based on the languages, describes the relationships between the different nations. The ethnographic work leaves out the Apache as a separate note, demonstrating that the novels successfully retell how the population separated the N'deé from the rest of the ethnic groups.

Enrigue, in a typically postmodern narrative structure, wrote his novel from different perspectives, including his journey. Nevertheless, a risky statement, however worth the thought, might be that the main plot, past and present wise, is the social dynamic of the emerging identities. The multiple voices shared help the reader understand how dialogue and experience

shaped their beliefs and life choices when confronted with a mixture of evaluations and interpretations, all converging toward survival.

On the one side, there is a Mexican troop led by Zuloaga, lieutenant colonel of the national army in Buenaventura, Chihuahua—previously, Nueva Vizcaya—and son of a former Spanish Royal Army colonel who, after the imminent formation of the Mexican Republic, changed alliances. Zuloaga is commissioned to start an ill-fated security crusade against the Apache who had raided a ranch near Janos; regardless of the odds against his expedition, the man heeded the request and recruited the most improbable soldiers: a Raramuri serving as a Mexican government employee, a female artist posing as a nun, a dance teacher knowledgeable in native languages and cultures, two Yaqui ex-cons, and a young Mexican rancher dubbed gringo because of being blond.

The opposing side is Mangas Coloradas's Apache band, which is fictionally recreated by the author's interpretation of their ways. Camila constitutes the third narrative within the plot; she is an orphaned Mexican woman, who had little luck in life because of her social standing and ended up being kidnapped by the Apache warrior after the attack on her dead husband's ranch. As she experiences the harsh process of being enculturated into the N'deé's lifestyle, the author provides a contrast on how resilience had much more to do with human survival skills and cultural conventions than violence and segregation.

Enrique's novel recreates, through a fictional narrative, a lively version of the context. Albeit Enrique warns that using Geronimo's words, as the book's title suggests, as an end to indigenous resistance, the novel paints a different scenario where, even though both governments promoted an extermination campaign and segregation policies, their oppression was unsuccessful in ending the Apache legend, culture, and live memory specially, with the author's parallel narrations up to present everyday life, identity formations, and public representations.

Moreover, González (2018) claims that Enrique's novel 'enlightens', from a Mexican perspective, a genre usually classified as American Western for retelling pioneer migration to present-day Southwestern States. Still, it is very much part of the Mexican heritage, though rarely spoken of. To the critic, Enrique's reconstruction of Geronimo, and we venture to include

the other main characters, is closely related to the author's interpretation of nationality, loyalty, and identity's complexity.

Enrique's historical novel takes place before McCarthy's, by thirty years or so, in the immediate aftermath of the declaration of the United Mexican States as a nation. *Blood Meridian* occurs a few years after the American War of Intervention in Mexico and the annexation (or purchase at an absurdly low price) of about half of the Mexican Republic and, before that, of the New Spain Viceroyalty, territories belonging to the Spanish crown. Whereas Enrique's novel begins in Buenaventura and moves north up into the present-day Gila Wilderness Reserve in New Mexico, the Glanton Gang, including the Judge, traverse similar territories but in a larger circle, from east Texas to central south Texas, then south for over two hundred miles through the Chihuahua desert and its mountains or small mountain ranges similar to islands, to Chihuahua city, then back up to the western side of the state of Chihuahua in the heights of the Sierra Madre Occidental, bordering with Sonora, across the present-day United States, to the east of Sacramento and Los Angeles. There, The Kid abandons his party, fleeing the Judge, and begins his journey, which takes him from San Francisco into the mountains and wilderness on the east, the Rockies presumably. It is in a town in north Texas where, years later, he reencounters the Judge in a saloon.

Nevertheless, the ground for both novels is mostly the great Chihuahua Desert and a few mountainous regions with coniferous forests: Gila Wilderness and the Sierra Madre Occidental; yet despite the similar settings, the heat, scarcity of water and food, days on end of walking in uninhabitable spaces, and remoteness, these are lived differently. The native nations have long been established in the territory and, throughout the viceroyalty period, adapted to the intruders, adopting sedentarism, agriculture, and farming as the way of life in the *rancherías*—a group of houses for small-scale ranching or ranch-hand employees—, or completely merging into the mestizo population. The newly named Mexicans had already settled into the vast space of Nueva Vizcaya and depended greatly on their symbiotic relationship with ally native nations.

However, the Glanton Gang is made up of the outcasts, miscasts, riff-raff at the beginning of the crest of the sweep westward of Americans look-

ing for a better life or of recent immigrants forced into the war against Mexico who stayed behind in the conquered lands or were pushed westwards against the tribes that inhabited the great plains in semi-nomadic synch with the cycles of nature, like the N'deé peoples and the buffalo migrations. The city of Chihuahua contracted the Gang as scalpers of the native Indians, mostly N'deé, and the novel is a fragment—only in this sense—of the greater war against the native Americans, whose only end is visualized and planned as death or incarceration.

Chart 1 shows a summarized version of how the narrative chains associated in each novel are entwined with the N'deé depictions in time. Based on the above-noted theoretical considerations, these representation chains only show a summarized plot of how each text's version of the Apache narrative may use similar representations. However, the viewpoint differs due to the contextual implications, which means that matching is not the principal aim. Still, the differences point to conflicts in the interpretation of the same oral narrative.

On every matching point where the versions meet, the short tales can be reshaped by using the multiple meanings and associations in representations and symbols to accommodate different struggles and the reasons for the outcomes and to offer cultural knowledge for future interpretations. The N'deé's historical path started before the Spanish exploration and has lived to their present movement to recover their Mexican territory. However, the novels point to events when the nations were fragmented by the political changes during the XIX century, but can also be traced to conflicts when they were written.⁶

Hence, we spot four different timelines influencing the narratives. First, there is the oral tradition that has carried N'deé history from the early XIV century to the XXI with the restoration movement in Mexico. Second, there is the fictional time in Enrique's novel, which leaps from the first decades of independent Mexico, with references to the colony, through the later years of the Apache wars in the 1880s, to Geronimo's final years in the XX century. Third, *Blood Meridian's* time span starts with The Kid's departure

⁶ As Paul Ricoeur (2004) points into historiographical considerations to further understand the text.

Chart 1. Narrative chains of N'dee representations

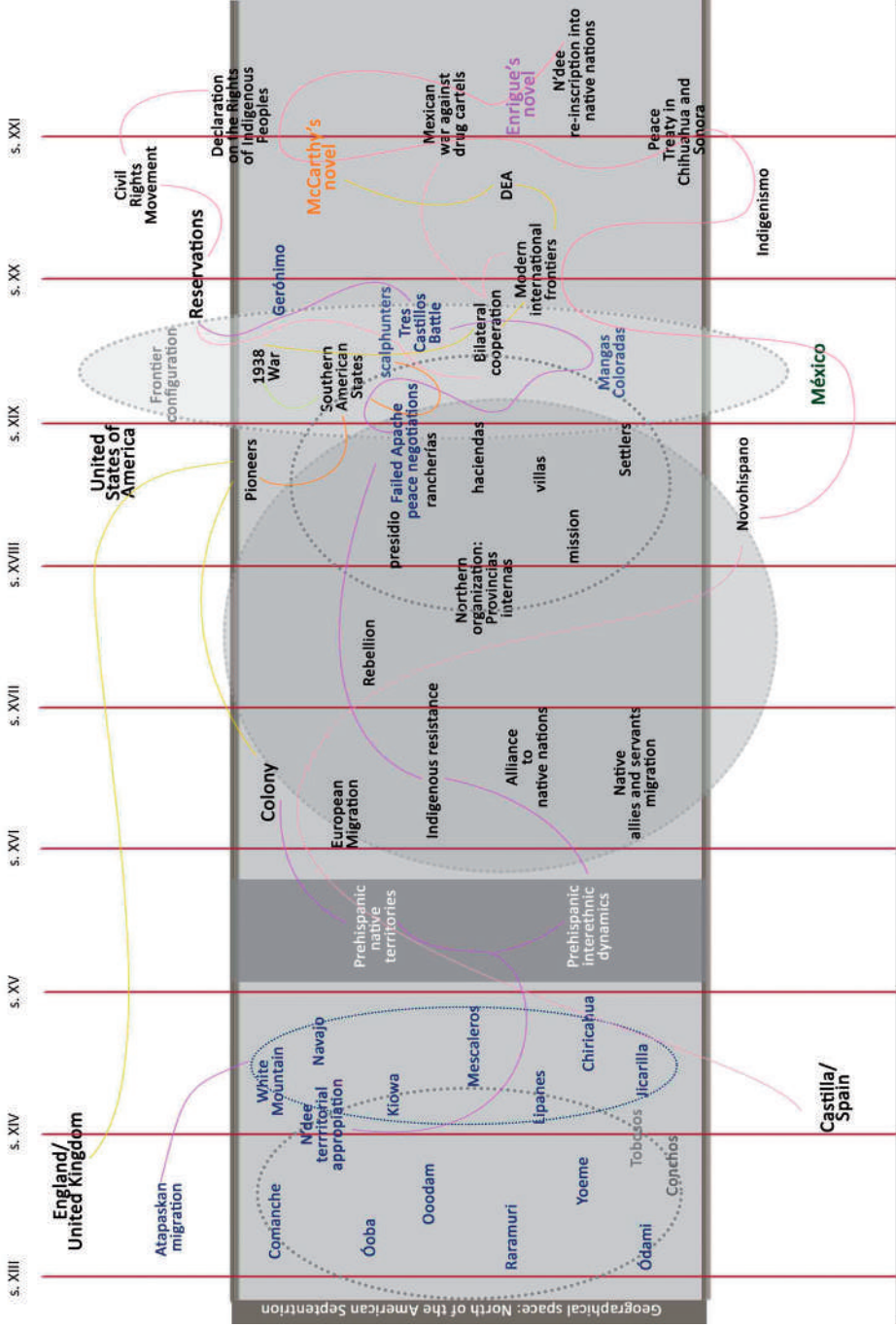


Chart 1. Narrative chains of N'dee representations

from Tennessee in 1833 and ends with his murder in Texas in 1878 (Sepich 2008). And finally, there is a line for each novel's position in time.

The narrative chains indeed shed light on how meanings, interpretations, and representations go through actualization in times of social struggle, territorial conflicts, and territorial reappropriation and then remain embedded in oral tradition, rehashed in fiction, preserving cultural beliefs, opinions, and desires indirectly. By expressly outlining the narratives entwined in the plot, historical events, and authors' influences, it is possible to convey how mapping the identity helped them to embed, through literary dexterity, representations of cultural traits and external meanings and associations in the Apache narrative that keep it relevant in present days.

Besides adopting its survival traits from the lived experience of the environment, identity also becomes evident in the characterizations the authors use for the subjects as reconstructed roles in the narratives. While the diversity is obvious, the process of formation of national identities is subjacent to the outer interactions and struggles, thus making it possible to prefigure the agencies and personifications of authorities, migrants and immigrants, settled populations, and the two nations in further future interpretation of conflict and potential solutions of interaction scenarios.

Firstly, the band members incorporated into the Mexican army by Enrique's lieutenant Zuluaga are a mixed bunch, even less homogenous in their eccentricity than the Glanton Gang. Their world, earlier in the century, different from McCarthy's, is more scarcely populated in a region whose vastness is, perhaps, the main characteristic and composed of—regarding characters—discrete entities: personality, civility, kindness, matter. There is also something zany, whimsical on the surface, or, at first sight, a parody of the pastoral novel. Their world is also that of friend and foe, but the divisions are less clearly marked, and there exists a more comprehensive range of grays, where rejection may become adoption, where differences are more easily recognized and tolerated;⁷ said differently, there are so few

⁷ A commonly attributed trait to the particular forms of segregation Mexican identity has used (Del Val 2004).

characters—true of both worlds—that they do seem to have existed previously to their encounter with Zuluaga as each man on his own, each one an island, which we know to be impossible. Zuluaga congregates them, but their fraternity is more that of a traveling circus or of second cousins than that of a gang. They are the remnants of New Spain, as well as the pioneers of the new Republic, though we could venture to say maybe neither since they are stuck in the middle of the identity construction process—a liminal state of sorts—where there is no true calling, hence the lost quest as predicted by Zuluaga's dad.

Secondly, Zuluaga is more of a paternal figure, whereas Judge Holden, in his ferocious idiosyncrasy, is both an outsider and an insider, a savant to be feared, a killer more ruthless and colder—more cerebral, more aloof—than any of the rest could expect to be. He joins the Gang or is a cocreator of the same, putting together a group of misfits in order to survive, but he can also travel alone when it suits him for his own reasons, both a pragmatist and a utilitarian. While Zuluaga is an authority from his legal standing, the Judge grants and retains his right to rule by his own will. A metaphor for both power ranges to date: the governments established by constitutional law and the organized crime that overrides their authority. The prefigured authoritative roles mentioned above apparently leave the secondary characters without agency, but this also results from them being common folk. However, this is an illusion of the elites—the leaders' delusion—for the commoners are the ones that bring the diversity, the kaleidoscopic views and the nuisances of identity configurations.

Thirdly, on the one hand, we have stark individualism bonded by pragmatism and materialism of the Glanton Gang that exudes from the American side which had already congregated at least fifty or seventy years earlier into a nation from scratch, so to say, as their immigrants were still pretty much settling; on the other, a band of eccentrics lost on the fringes of the former Spanish Empire with a previous ideological reference to interaction—for three centuries—, who delivered into a newly formed Mexican State a concept not yet clearly formed or defined by then. Existing on the fringes of the newly created modern frontiers and the boundlessness of the harsh desert is their main trait; they are outsiders to their nation in terms

of lawful, ideological, and cultural bounds, yet insiders in their legitimate claim to act. While bonded by open space, nothing to do, and recruited to participate in a mission of sorts out of opportunity more than a calling or adscription, both groups rely on an array of differences and similarities that later grew into national identities. It is a real mission—if only ever established by a mutual foe, the Apache, and a faraway order—but it is also a self-imposed, self-created mission—in this sense, an adventure—and the participants are somehow all aware of this. In the first, we can speak of a *modus vivendi*; in the second, of a *modus existendi*. Thereby, two ways of interaction in the borderlines of both nations are depicted.

Last but not least, there is the indigenous side of the narratives with its ethnic alliances and rifts that, as previously mentioned, predate the later colonization. However, our focus is mostly on the contradictions blended into the background of the main plot: the N'deé tribes and their struggles are the reason and symbolic figure that envelops the development of the stories, not the outsiders who are turned into the main characters. The N'deé migrated and built their territory about a century and a half before the first Spanish expeditions, making their claim to their indigenous rights—from the modern State's viewpoints—absurdly controversial and an opportunity to criminalize their resistance. While also turning them into both heroes and victims, the outlaws are immortalized as underdogs in the narrative, both a precautionary tale not to defy the State and a metaphor for hope and survival through sacrifice in the form of their warriors' legends: Mangas Coloradas, Cochise, Geronimo.

The space in *Ahora me rindo y eso es todo* is set in the north of north-central Mexico, far from the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (The Royal Way of Inland New Spain) and the cities it connected: in its northern second to last part, it went from Zacatecas (1588) to Durango (1563), Parral (1631) and Chihuahua (1652/1709), all in their origin mining towns that became prosperous colonial cities; and in its last part, the trail connected El Paso del Norte (1659), Albuquerque (1706), and Santa Fe (1598). In Enrígue's novel, there is no city to speak of; Buenavista, a rancheria, and Janos, a presidio, are mentioned as remnants of civilization's effort in the quasi-abandoned former Spanish Empire glory, close to the furthest northwest

part of Chihuahua; awfully far from the once endless conquered territory up north and, also, at an enormous distance from the new Republic's center, Mexico City, which further exacerbated the neglect of outer provinces, internal conflicts, and lack of resources. Since vice royal times, Chihuahua and other northern states had long been far-sighted by Mexico City. Zuluaga's expedition took him further north to the forest area where there was a significant N'deé settlement—the largest inhabited place—in what today is the Gila Wilderness Area in New Mexico.

Ahora me rindo y eso es todo is a novel in three parts: Zuluaga's rescue expedition, Enrigue's road trip with his wife and two daughters to the places in the American Southwest he had previously investigated to write the historical fiction, and the information he collected that goes beyond the time frame of his historical novel and narrates the termination of the N'deé way of life by both the American and the Mexican government at the end of XIX century. Zuluaga's expedition as historical fiction is one of the main themes of this essay, but it is worth noting that Enrigue's road trip does begin in a large city, New York, where he lives and has done his research, to end in some of the present day least populated regions of the United States: primarily parts of Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico.

In this sense, Enrigue's novel also reflects on the reality of the city and its contrary in four different aspects. First, the permanence to date the N'deé have demonstrated in surviving the attempts at extermination that proves their resilience and own role in this context. Second, ideological colonization and identity homogenization as a failed venture inherited from the rules governing the modern State policies on citizenship and the bestowal of it. Third, the persistent inability of modern nationalism to include all subjects and its refusal to open ways for those in opaque situations to access it. And finally, the fact that the region remains mostly vacant under the standard of civilized territory, with typically small cities and sparsely populated areas, bringing into question the effectiveness of the conquest efforts in local terms.

Then, therein lies another main argumentative difference between both novels. *Blood Meridian* is structured in relation to the city of Chihuahua and its contrast, duality, parallelism, similarity in the difference, between the city and the desert as wasteland, or high mountains as wilderness. The

only city relevant to *Blood Meridian* is Chihuahua, which appears to be the only city for hundreds of miles around, if there is any other city at all. As a first impression, *Blood Meridian* could lead to depicting Chihuahua as the only civilized place on the map. On rereading the novel, this impression became an issue, and Chihuahua turned into the other side of the coin, or one of the many facets of the world conceived by the Judge, who is aware that civilization is as ruthless, if not more, as barbarism.

Through different arguments, though, both novels converge on one truth: ancient tradition, culture in its most customized ways of experiencing life through society is more human and civil—the N'deé transformation of Camila or the reservations' hospitality and nostalgia—than the modern take of justice and laws, as portrayed by the Judge who personifies the capitalist, self-made man of the conquered lands in the West, the so-called civilization and equality, imposed by brute force and rationale, at a high cost of homogenization.

How do we classify these two novels, different in many ways, yet similar in a few commonly held intuitions and aspects? Enrique's historical fiction, aside from his road trip chronicle and historical essay, is realistic and gritty, with its good share of violence and pathos, and, yet, it is also fun, whimsical comedy. The novel's desert is not that region of the unknown, of dark forces, of exile in classical Greece, of the daemonic in Judeo-Christian literature, but more of that other arid land, La Mancha, and its characters, or *A Thousand and One Nights*. Therein, its irony is linked—despite the enormous open spaces and skies—to Calderon and Shakespeare's "the world is a stage" and to a baroque ethos. It is also a combination of desert and prairie land, depending on the season, and possibly one of the reasons for its lighter, more spacious prose. In contrast, *Blood Meridian* takes place to the east—extreme desert—in the gang's approaches to the city of Chihuahua, and to the west, in the mountainous terrains of the Sierra Madre Occidental, when the Gang retreats.

As we have seen above, violence in *Ahora me rindo y eso es todo* is seen as a necessity at times, but not the norm, or not by necessity the norm. It is also seen as a necessary test of resilience and its cultivation, a violent rite of passage with its accompanying intentionality of a cultural

cognitive reset, which does not totally succeed, nor is it expected to. Only isolation from the past life and time will permit the dominance of the new identity, linked, evidently and originally, to survival, and then a possible adoption and election of the new values, relations, and modes: a crash course in survival with its forcing the boundaries of physical pain and mental alienation. In Enríquez's novel, violence is not all. Violence and conflict are cyclic, which paradoxically makes for a much more fictional account, plot-wise, than the realistic depictions in *Blood Meridian*.

Violence, in all its dimensions, is the world of *Blood Meridian*. It is omnipresent, individual, and collective, full of vivid massacres and personified to the extreme in the evil and horrible Judge Holden, whom Bloom describes as "the most frightening figure in all of American literature" (2001: 255). However, the reading experience is one of rejection—as occurred to Bloom the first times he wanted to read it—or of total immersion. However, he also writes, "[...] the book's magnificence—its language, landscape, persons, conceptions—at last, transcends the violence, and converts gore into terrifying art, an art comparable to Melville's and Faulkner's" (Bloom 2001: 255). According to Adam Zachary Newton's *Narrative Ethics*, it would, in this at least initial repulsion, fall into that category of literary works that take the reader as a prisoner.

As a third possibility of narrative—particularly of *Blood Meridian*—we may consider, besides storytelling by which "teller, listener, and witness become bound to one another through [its] liberating force [...] storytelling [that] fastens on to its participants only to sever them from the world" (Newton: 7). That this is not, neither the former nor the latter, so is explained, only in part, by the high rhetoric of the language, similar to Greek tragedy, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, as well as to the extreme violence we have been living in this same region—El Paso, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua—and which had, and has, affected all of our lives. Interestingly, the novel's subtitle is *The Evening Redness in the West*, which alludes to a natural phenomenon that is especially particular to this region.

In this subtle but definite way, McCarthy underlines the realistic nature of his historical novel and that blood meridian is not—at least not directly—a reference to the bloodletting of violence. Or that its only realism

is that of ongoing, unstoppable violence. The subtitle could also indicate that the bloodletting could be that of nature. Terrifyingly so, the scariest violence is not that one, but the one we experience daily (Theidon 2001), as a consistent element that haunts the subject and its choices (Taussig 1992), to the point in which death is mercy as it brings it to an end. Weil described this as “Here we see force in its grossest and most summary form—the force that kills. How much more varied in its processes, how much more surprising in its effects is the other force, the force that does *not* yet kill, that does not kill just yet” (322).

We find no irony in McCarthy's epic novel in the sense of its extreme and univocal realism, for it takes the literal as its only meaning. Only in so far as that it is obsessive to the extreme, with description and narration rich but limited to what is underfoot, at hand, and exposition and argumentation left to a minimum, mainly to be intuited; only in so far as that it is a microcosmos—the Judge's—, and that other microcosmos may exist; in so far as the great dialogues permit glimpses of otherness, the novel is referential. Only in this lies its irony: inside and outside the novel, and the unacceptable yet real similarities. A further, perhaps more significant, irony is that the present-day reality of the binational region is well portrayed in this fiction—based on historical investigation—taking place in the mid-nineteenth century, 170 years ago. Is the Judge the reader of an atemporal reality? However, the intentionality of the novel is, we insist, realistic to the extreme and not naturalism.

One last observation on the novels' styles: realist (universalist) in Enrigue, nominalist in McCarthy, although the Judge seems an Aristotelian in his classifications of nature. Perhaps, more importantly, the Judge and his world, *Blood Meridian*, cannot be classified as one would initially like: as nihilist, tragic, or gnostic. There are no values to be overturned; for the Glanton Gang, the city of Chihuahua is as much a war zone as any other place. There is a hierarchy to the interior of the Gang based on power and killing expertise, but there is no code of honor. It is not a tragedy, for the Kid—as Bloom (2009) writes—doesn't even acquire a name. He is doomed from the start—which may describe tragedy—but there is no development in his character regarding self-knowledge. To put it in more colloquial terms, he doesn't have a fighting chance. This, paradoxically,

rules him out as a protagonist or antagonist. *Blood Meridian*, like very early Greek tragedy, only has a protagonist, but the Judge is no protagonist, nor is he faced by any chorus as his interlocutor.

The hopelessness that allows no protagonism permeates Enrique's account: there is no fighting chance for the recruits, either Zuluaga and his lost quest or the Apache. But neither had the author a fighting chance at opposing Spain's current government since he had to pledge allegiance to the monarchy, implying a possible betrayal of his family's origin as republican Spanish refugees in Mexico and, therefore, a manifestation of his loyalty and belonging which had given him no chances to return to his Spanish heritage. Nor, sadly, will his children or the reservations' kids, for all their innocence and wishful dreams, have it since the story is cyclic, as foretold by both novels.

These novels have no place for heroes, which may be a minor ethical gain; the space only allows for mercenaries, a seven-foot bald as a stone albino, who also dances and plays the fiddle and has made of himself a greater-than-human war machine. Mangas Coloradas failed to be ruthless in the end, for his men let Corredor go, which, in the end, brought his people's downfall. Cochise, the last Apache chief, had to befriend the enemy—the Americans—in order to survive the Mexican attacks and, even then, had no peace in life or death. Geronimo, the last warrior, a realist, a strategist, but never a chief nor hero to his people, had to declare the surrender.

Blood Meridian is traversed by the importance of technology and its discoveries. In this, its epic nature is brought into doubt, possibly the genre as such is questioned by the author, as there is no magical or mystical force but the violent advance of technology that decides the outcome. There is no explanation for the Judge's evil in that it reflects its surroundings, which may seem too simple and reductionist, nor for his agelessness or vitality and belief in vitalism. No other literary work—one thinks of Goethe's *Faustus* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*—has shown human abilities (art, the inquisitive mind and sciences, intelligence) to be more amoral or, at the same time, used for evil. The Judge is not a demiurge, creator of the world he inhabits, but an ageless, fixed part of it.

His explanation of the world and himself emerges from the territory itself: he is a survivor and maps the manual for survival in this reality, but

as a pragmatist, a realist, not gnostic. His awareness of ethical hierarchy at play has no place for evil or good, only an unperishable will to live against all odds. Whether he has fallen into a wasteland now seems of secondary importance. Underlining his spite and his psychopathic nature would imply dualism and *Blood Meridian* is a seamless garment. However, the post-modern style in Enrigue's novel allows multivocality in the expeditions' portrayal, and the ethical considerations are purely circumstantial, veiled under diversity, and dependent on the characters and reader's viewpoint; they go hand in hand with the contextual need to belong, to exist, to survive.

McCarthy achieves a portrayal that is both monolithic and undeniable, demonstrating that such a reality is not only possible but exists: *Blood Meridian* as a warning, prophetic, apocalyptic. Enrigue is not far behind in his ability to disguise violence as a subtext, as a much-needed initiation for Camila and a lawful expedition. Enrigue does a wonderful job at concealing the violent nature, at weaving it into a seamless coexistent reality that makes it easier to digest to a postmodern audience, easily offended in its civilized inclusion, nonetheless cruel and barbaric.

Both novels are relevant until the present since lawlessness remains in the region. The drug cartels, human trafficking and gun-running, spree murders, massacres, the alarming number of rape and murder of girls and young women in the past fifteen years, illegal migration, partial and corrupt governments, everything on the Mexican American border is an ongoing issue. The accounts of the frontier being brutal and violent are still alive in oral tradition, news, academic research, political discourse, and art, such as literature.

The Judge may be the answer to why territorial appropriation is so relevant. When he is sitting in the middle of the desert, as if waiting for the Gang to join them, as if he had always been a part of the landscape, McCarthy paints a man and a territory becoming one. Judge Holden does something that makes him immortal by inscribing himself into the context: he names, registers, classifies, thus creating his own language to shape space and configure it according to his interests. The Judge's identity recreated itself from the knowledge he gathered and made it possible for him to rule in a lawless place.

Not only in the times portrayed but in the writing of the novels, we'd have to make note of the authors' personal and social contexts. McCarthy's book follows the start of the Drug Enforcement Agency in the late 1970s and the coordinated operations between the Mexican armed forces and American agents, consulting and supervising the destruction of illegal crops. Even though this had begun in the 1930s (Pérez Ricart 2020), the reinforcement of operations made evident the cooperation policies that started in the McLane-Ocampo Treaty following the American invasion of Mexico. Moreover, as Pérez Ricart analyzes, this has never meant a unilateral imposition from the Northern State but a joint decision and strategy of both countries, which, in the name of drug eradication, have foregone ecological, social, and humanitarian aspects.

Enrique's novel shares the drug-fighting context. It was written after Calderon's war against drugs, which has been labeled by Ríos (2013) as a self-enforced social conflict by competition for territories between the cartels that the government enhances with violent policies. Moreover, Valenzuela and Ortega (2013) note that territorial construction and government have been weakened despite the military and police interventions, resulting in the loss of State control over certain regions, which is remarkably similar, even if fictional, to Zuluaga's reliance on others more than on his own official authority.

Another noteworthy undertone, although Enrique never explicitly mentions it in his personal narrative passages, is the metaphor of the Apache exile as Enrique's own quest for identity and nationality. It is a metaphor to question the Apache's pursuit of restitution when he finally refused Spanish citizenship, and, as a result, he portrays the idealization of a Mexico that fosters diversity, and thus represents a nostalgic place for him. Coincidentally, there is also the fact that he is unable to go back to Mexico until the American visa arrives, making it full circle into the Apache's exile and lack of the possibility of becoming American citizens for decades, but kept away as antiheroes in a foreign country.

Regardless of Enrique's effort to mediate the issue of membership and alliance with a subtext on how identities change and coexist in different contexts and historical moments, he leaves a counterargument in his own decision if it is posed from the N'deé perspective: how they are to be re-

instated in a country that betrayed them, and why reclaiming one's origin is something to be longed for, or worth it all. Yet it is part of the human experience to long for that which helps us belong by rehashing the tales that brought us to the present date.

Perhaps the most useful part of analyzing how narratives match human experiences and emotions regarding historical events like the N'deé's presumed alienation or their retelling in certain moments of cultural and political struggle—similar to the present migrant crisis and organized crime violence in the Mexican-American border—comes at different times repeatedly when reference and interpretations aim for sources of meaning in the shared memories and past stories. By comparing both novels, in their authors' differences, it is possible to shed light on the long-standing issues in these territories, their subjacent elements, and the complexity of actors involved, all through the art of literature, making it a social forum that transcends literature.

Referenced bibliography

- ALMADA BAY, IGNACIO and NORMA DE LEÓN FIGUEROA. "Las gratificaciones por cabellera. Una táctica del gobierno del estado de Sonora en el combate a los apaches, 1930-1880", en *Intersticios Sociales*, núm. 11 (2016): 1-29. <<https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=421744677004>>.
- BARTH, KARL. *Ethics*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013.
- BLOOM, HAROLD. *How to read and why*. New York City: Touchstone, 2001.
- BLOOM, HAROLD (ed.). *Cormac McCarthy*. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism an imprint Infobase Publishing, 2009.
- BORGES, JORGE LUIS. *El aleph*. Barcelona: Alianza Editorial, 1998.
- CASTELLS, MANUEL. *The power of identity*. 2. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- CHARLES, TAYLOR. *Sources of the self. The making of modern identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- CHÁVEZ CHÁVEZ, JORGE. "Barbarism and identities imposed on the natives of the northern Mexican border during the nineteenth century", en *Changes, conflicts, and ideologies in contemporary hispanic culture*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2014.
- DEL VAL, JOSÉ. *México: identidad y nación*. Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2014. Electrónico.
- DOUGLAS, CHRISTOPHER. "The unfilmable 'blood meridian'", en *The Conversation* (11 March 2018). April 25 2023. <<https://theconversation.com/the-unfilmable-blood-meridian-91719>>.

- ENRIGUE, ÁLVARO. *Ahora me rindo y eso es todo*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2018. Electrónico.
- GONZÁLEZ, JOSÉ IGNACIO. "Ahora me rindo y eso es todo", en *Revista Otra Parte* (December 20 2018). April 25 2023. <<https://www.revistaotraparte.com/literatura-iberoamericana/ahora-me-rindo-y-eso-es-todo/>>.
- JAMES, CARYN. " 'Blood meridian', by Cormac McCarthy", en *The New York Times* (April 28 1985). 2 April 25 2023. <<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/28/books/blood-meridian-by-cormac-mccarthy.html>>.
- MASTERS, JOSHUA J. " 'Witness to the Uttermost Edge of the World': Judge Holden's textual enterprise in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*", en *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 40.1 (1988): 25-37.
- MCCARTHY, CORMAC and PHILIPP MEYER. *Blood Meridian or the evening redness in the west*. Dublin: Pan Macmillan, 2002. Electronic.
- NEWTON, ADAM ZACHARY. *Narrative Ethics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- OROZCO Y BERRA, MANUEL. *Carta etnográfica de México. 1864*. April 25 2023. <<http://bdmx.mx/documento/galeria/carta-etnografica-mexico>>.
- OVALLE, LILIAN PAOLA. "Construcción social del narcotráfico como ocupación", en *Revista CS*, 5 (2010): 92-122.
- PÉREZ RICART, CARLOS A. "Taking the war on drugs down south: the drug enforcement administration in Mexico (1973-1980)", en *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* (2020).
- RICOEUR, PAUL. *Tiempo y narración I. Configuración del tiempo en el relato histórico*. Trad. Agustín Neira. México: Siglo XXI Editores, 2004.
- RÍOS, VIRIDIANA. "Why did Mexico become so violent? A self-reinforcing violent equilibrium caused by competition and enforcement", en *Trends in Organized Crime* 16.2 (2013): 138-155.
- ROBERTS, DAVID. *Once they moved like the wind. Cochise, Geronimo and the Apache wars*. New York: Touchstone, 1994.
- SEPICH, JOHN EMIL. "The dance of history in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*", en *The Southern Literary Journal* (1991): 16-31.
- SEPICH, JOHN EMIL. *Notes on Blood Meridian: revised and explained edition*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008.
- SERVÍN, ENRIQUE. *El agua y la sombra*. Chihuahua: Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, 2003.
- TAUSSIG, MICHAEL. *The nervous system*. Routledge: Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc., 1992.
- TAYLOR, CHARLES. *Sources of the self*. Cambridge: Harvard university Press, 2001.
- THEIDON, KIMBERLY. "Terror's talk: fieldwork and war", en *Dialectical Anthropology* (2001): 19-35.
- VALENZUELA AGUILERA, ALFONSO y MARIANA ORTEGA BREÑA. "Urban surges: power, territory and the social control of space in Latin America", en *Latin American Perspectives* 40.2 (2013): 21-34.
- WEIL, SIMONE. "The Iliad, or the poem of force", en *Politics* (November 1945).

ROBERTO L. RANSOM CARTY

Was awarded a Fullbright scholarship at the University of Virginia for a Ph.D. from the theology, ethics, and culture department and has a Master's degree in comparative literature. As an author, his literary work varies from short stories and children's literature to novels and literary essays; his most recently published texts are *La Casa Desertada*, *Graham Greene en México* – Fine Arts Award of the Malcolm Lowry Literary Essay – and *La Quema de la Correspondencia*. He is a tenured professor at Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua in the Arts and the Philosophy schools and does research at postgraduate programs on narrative ethics, literary genres, hermeneutics, tragedy, and dramatic studies.

DOLORES PRIETO JASPEADO

Is a Ph.D. candidate at Doctorado en Educación, Artes y Humanidades at Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua, under the advisory of Dr. Ransom Carty. She holds a Master's Degree in cultural anthropology from Escuela de Antropología e Historia del Norte de México and worked as an organizational communications consultant in the private and public sector. She has been a teacher at all school levels, and her research follows cultural cognition learning, pragmatic communications, and collective knowledge. Her previous publication is *Modularidad y violencia. Una interpretación alterna al narcotráfico en Chihuahua*.