

[A]Cross Borders: U.S.-Mexico Periodical Archives Digital Project

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Abstract:

This paper describes the Borderlands Archive Cartography (BAC), which is a project that uses digitization and digital mapping to facilitate access to periodicals published on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The goals of the project are: 1) to increase access to literary materials to academic researchers and borderland communities with historical, cultural, and political significance produced along the border and, 2) to preserve unique information found in periodicals from the region.

Keywords: Borderlands, Cartography, Digital Humanities, Newspapers, Latino/a

Borders are in a constant transition in the political, cultural, and geographic discourses. According to Rachel St. John, “walls and fences have become both physical realities and metaphors for the stark divide between the United States and Mexico and the attempt to control undocumented immigration and illegal drug trafficking that many people associate with the border” (1). Borderlands Archives Cartography (BAC)¹ emerges from the constant, and current aggressive, political rhetoric that displays the geographic and ideological border between the United States and Mexico as a threat. The borderland “is a space where different cultures co-exist under strong political, economic, and social hegemonies; as well as, a space

¹ The digital map of BAC can be found in <https://artepublicopress.com/recovery-project/cartografia-de-periodicos-fronterizos-1800-1960/>

were regions influence each other, but maintain their own identities” (Álvarez dissertation)². Therefore, the objective of BAC is to uncover literary sources, such as the newspapers published on the U.S. Southwest and Northern area of Mexico in order to represent the borderlands by their own communities.

Why the focus on periodicals? Though printing was first introduced to the Americas in 1533, fourteen years following the arrival of Spaniards to the region now known as Mexico, the persistent prevailing perception is that the United States has always been the neighbor leading innovation and dominant producer of cultural advancements. That is not the case, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans inhabiting the Southwest have been practicing literary production and self-documentation that predates the birth of the United States. In the borderlands, these cultural interactions gave rise to new identities as a result of the loss of territory, immigrations, exile, and deterritorialization. This is reflected in recovered material such as periodicals, which kept communities informed about daily affairs and advertised local businesses, among many other services. On the other hand, these publications helped individuals and [its residents] protect their rights by fighting segregation and discrimination, particularly after the cession of the borderlands to the United States in 1848. Newspapers preserved language and culture, elevating communities’ education levels by publishing creative literature in Spanish, including poetry, literary prose, serialized novels, and plays (Kanellos and Martell 7-8). Additionally, newspapers have documented diverse political, social, and economic processes from U.S. colonial times to more recent events that helps [to better] understand the [borderland and transnational] cultures (Chávez Chávez).

The paper, “[A]Cross Borders: U.S.-Mexico Periodical Archives Digital Project,” describes an ongoing digital humanities project based out of the *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Program* located in Houston, Texas (USA). With a national and international recognition, the Recovery Program founded by Nicolás Kanellos, Ph.D. and directed by Carolina Villarroel, Ph.D., is committed to “locating, rescuing from perishing, evaluating, disseminating and publishing collections of primary literary sources written by [Latinos/as] in the geographic area that is now the United States from the Colonial Period to 1960” (Kanellos 13). Its twenty-five years legacy inspired the founders of the Borderlands Archives Cartography (BAC) project, doctoral students from the University of Houston, Maira E. Álvarez and Sylvia A. Fernández, from borderland cities of Laredo, Texas and El Paso, Texas/Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, respectively. Their experience as Research Fellows in the Recovery Program gave them an understanding of the importance of archives and their cultural and historical legacy, as well as, training on equipment and procedures necessary for the preservation of such materials. Their exposure to a database with more than 40,000 recovered newspapers by the Recovery Program led the founders to a series of questions regarding the periodicals not only from the United States border, but the material found in archives along the Mexico border region, too. These academic experiences along with their personal interest on U.S.-Mexico border is reflected on their dissertations and the BAC project, which initiated in early 2017³.

The project is significant because it crosses multiple borders: geographic, linguistic, and disciplinary. The following is an overview of the logistics involved in undertaking such a

² Maira E. Álvarez’s dissertation, *Mexican and Mexican-American Fronteriza Writers: A Counter Discourse from a Militarized Border*.

³ Maira E. Álvarez’s dissertation title, *Mexican and Mexican-American Fronteriza Writers: A Counter Discourse from a Militarized Border*. Sylvia A. Fernández’s dissertation title, *Genealogía transfronteriza: La resistencia de los sujetos de la frontera entre México-Estados Unidos*.

project, the philosophy for creating this corpus, a description of the borders, and the historical periods and communities involved. Furthermore, the objective of BAC is to gather periodicals archives from both sides of the border in order to understand the region and its communities before and after it became a division line. This project takes a digital humanities platform to expand the notion of borders, methodologies, and data analysis with the purpose to facilitate the access to the material recovered and diverse forms of research. BAC's digital map displays the U.S.-Mexico border newspaper cartography that records geographic locations of nineteenth and mid-twentieth century periodicals. The corpus gathered until now is projected using Carto, a geo-analysis tool, which helps to analyze and represent visually the data.

By following the cataloging material standards of the Library of Congress, the information coded in the map is categorized by newspaper title, location (city, state, and country), address, number of issues available, years of publication, language (Spanish, English, French), editor/s name, source (name of the collection), and historical periods (period one, period two and period three). The selection of newspapers from both sides of the border followed BAC's protocols, in which the historical periods dictated the states and regions (cities and counties) to be considered as part of the borderlands. The US border includes the states California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana. The latter state is included due to the influence of the press during the nineteenth century. Currently, the U.S. data collected is from the Recovering Program. This material is available through microfilm at Arte Público Press located at the University of Houston, or digitally through the NewsBank/Readex database: America's Historical Newspapers under the Hispanic American Newspaper Collections and EBSCO database: under Arte Público Hispanic Historical Collection Series 1 and Series 2.

From the Mexican border, BAC includes the periodical from the states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas. The data of newspapers collected comes from the Recovery Program, the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, a unit of the University of Texas Libraries, and the Hemeroteca de la Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas under the Fondos Documentales Joaquín Meade. The material of the Recovery Program can be accessed through the online sources previously mentioned. The newspapers from the collection of Joaquín Meade can be found in the Hemeroteca de la Universidad de Tamaulipas' website. The Benson Collection is available in microfilm form at the University of Texas Libraries. The digitized material can be accessed through the Recovery Program and the Hispanic Special Collection at the University of Houston.

It is important to note, that BAC's digital humanities structure foments a collaborative approach. For instance, the Benson Collection was digitized through the BAC project with the help of the archivist Lisa Cruces from the University of Houston. In collaboration with Cruces, BAC obtained the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection. Cruces got access to the material through the Interlibrary Loan service and helped to categorize the periodicals according to the standards used by the project. Afterwards, the microfilms were digitized by the Recovery Program and the Hispanic Special Collection and made accessible for the public and the mapping process. With this alliance, BAC accelerated the integration of periodicals from the Mexican side of the border found in US library archives. BAC made possible not only this collaboration, but also others across the border. Specialists from the northern states of Mexico were contacted initially through the Colegio de la Frontera Norte's

online directory⁴. A description of the project, as well as the objectives of the research were sent to the archivist and directors in charge of newspapers archives related to BAC. They responded with great excitement and provided an extraordinary amount of information found in their archives. The digitized newspapers obtained by these colleagues were included in the database, the newspapers on microfilm will be requested to be digitized, and the newspapers in print form, which is a larger portion of the collections in Mexico, will be a slow and challenging process because travel, equipment, organization, and time are required for their integration to the digital platform and access.

As mentioned before, the data from both sides of the border followed BAC's protocols, in which the historical periods dictated the selection of states and regions (cities and counties) to be considered as part of the borderlands. This is due to the fact that the U.S.-Mexico border went over a geographical and political transition that established what is now the current division line. With this in mind, the periodicals found in BAC are categorized in one of the three historical periods according to the year published.

Period One (Colonial ruling), covers the years 1808 to 1846. During the early nineteenth century, newspapers printed in Spanish language emerged in New York, Louisiana, and San Francisco, California. *El Misisipi*, published in 1808 and *El Mensajero Luisianés* in 1809, were among the first Spanish-language newspapers in New Orleans—and the oldest newspapers recovered in the United States (Kanellos xiv). In 1808, Spain ruled over the Americas, which included Central and South America, and part of North American territory. The Spanish colonies in the New Spain comprised what is now Mexico, and the states of: California, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, Oregon, Washington, Florida, and some parts of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Kansas, Oklahoma and Louisiana. The colonies in the Spanish borderlands were ruled by the New Spanish order. However, in 1800 Spain ceded the Louisiana territory to France and later in 1802 France sold it to the United States (Griswold del Castillo 8). The boundaries between these two territories became a dispute for years to come. In 1813, the printing press arrived in Texas “as part of the Mexican Independence movement” (Kanellos xiii). During this year “the first newspapers printed in exile were the bilingual *La Gaceta de Texas* and *El Mexicano*, printed in the safety of U.S. territory just across the border from New Spain in Natchitoches, Louisiana (just across the Sabine River from Nacogdoches, Texas)” (Kanellos 9). Periodicals from period one documented the end of the Spanish colonial empire in the American hemisphere and Mexico's independence in 1810 that brought political and territorial instability. During this period Spain and the United States came to terms and recognized the boundary line between Texas and Louisiana through the Adams-Onís Treaty (1819) (Griswold del Castillo 8).

Later the signing of the Treaty of Limits in 1831 recognized the sovereignty of Mexico over Texas leaving its boundaries still unclear. The Texas independence in 1836, which lasted nine years, declared the territory north and east of the Rio Grande from Mexico as theirs, such claims of independence and boundaries were never recognized by Mexico. In 1846 an encounter between U.S. and Mexican troops north of the bank of the Rio Grande led to claims of invasion by the United States. With the backdrop of the Manifest Destiny, a term and idea created by John O'Sullivan, the editor of the *Democratic Review*, and the expansionist ideals—that sprang from a series of American presidents—the U.S. declared war on Mexico in May 1846 (Griswold del Castillo 4, 11). Newspapers such as, *Boletín de*

⁴ El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (El Colef) is an institution of scientific research and graduate education, which is part of the System of Public Centers for Research of the CONACYT (National Council for Science and Technology). Regional Headquarters: Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, Monterrey, Ciudad Juárez, and Mexicali.

Tamaulipas (1830) published in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, *El Voto de Coahuila* (1841) from Saltillo, Coahuila, *El Latigo de Texas* (1843) and *The Republic of Rio Grande* (1846) both published in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, were some of the periodicals printed in the northern states of Mexico.

Period Two (Mexican-American War) extends from 1847 to 1853. Periodicals from these years like *The American Pioneer* (1847) from Monterrey, Nuevo León, *The California Star* (1847) from San Francisco, California, *Sentinel* (1848) published in Saltillo, Coahuila, and *Corpus Christi Star* (1848) from Corpus Christi, Texas, documented some of the events related to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848. The Treaty ceded Alta California (what is now California and Arizona), New Mexico, and the Rio Grande boundary. Articles VIII and IX negotiated the property rights and American citizenship for Mexican citizens among other issues (Griswold del Castillo 40). The U.S. military occupation in Mexican territory, especially near the capital, the debt with British money brokers, a weakened Mexican army, and the constant change in government played a key role in the signing of the treaty by Mexican officials. However, the cartography errors found in the *Disturnell's Map of Mejico*, published in 1847 and used for the treaty, led once more to the dispute of the territory (55-56). In 1851, commissioners from the U.S. met with Mexican representatives to agree on new international boundaries. The compromise brought instability along the border and confusion over the new limits. This situation, along with the discovery of gold in California in 1848, ignited once more the United States' "desire for rights of transit across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec... [which] led to the U.S. dispatch of James Gadsden to Mexico" (59). After threats of military force, Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna signed the drafting of the Gadsden Treaty or Tratado de Mesilla in 1854. With this treaty, the United States agreed to pay 10 million dollars gaining an additional 29,142,000 acres of Mexican territory for a railroad. This also released them from the control of hostile Indian incursions stipulated in Article XI of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and "grant[ed] rights of transit across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec" (Griswold del Castillo 59-60). Some of the newspapers that date from period two are *El Constitucional* (1850) from Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, *La Bandera Mexicana* (1850) published in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, and *Noticias Tierra-fuera* (1852) from Chihuahua, Chihuahua, among other periodicals mapped on the cartography.

Period Three (Transition to the current division line) runs from 1854 to 1930. After the Gadsden Treaty or Tratado de Mesilla (1854) governmental representatives from both sides continued to remake maps of the United States and Mexico because of the new boundaries. Borderland natives constantly moved back and forth across the boundary line, causing "battles for control of the border [that continue through] the 1880s as settlers, soldiers, filibusters, and Native people [defended, displaced, and defied] the boundary line and the sovereign limits it signified" (St. John 39). In 1857, President James Buchanan tried to purchase more territory of the northern part of Chihuahua, most of Sonora, and Baja California, but Mexican officials rejected the U.S. offers. By the end of the 1880s, between "the United States and Mexico [emerged] a transnational capitalist economy [such as railroad cars, cattle, and capital investment]" (61-62). In the late 1800s and early 1900s communities from both sides of the border began to form binational urbanizing spaces, this brought a "society divided by neither national citizenship nor the boundary line, but by class and racial-ethnic categories" (St. John 88).

The dictatorship of Mexican President Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) led to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920); while the United States entered the First World War (1917). These

events marked a period that created new border-crossing regulations such as “stricter regulations on who and what could cross the border and armed men and physical barriers to enforce them” (St. John 120). According to Clara Lomas, “The United States-Mexico border area, especially the urban centers of Laredo, San Antonio, El Paso, and Los Angeles, served as important centers for some of the precursory work for the first major revolution of the twentieth century, what has come to be known as the Mexican Revolution (xi-xii). A considerable number of periodicals in the border region such as, *La Corregidora* (1901), *La Crónica* (1909) both published in Laredo, Texas, *La Voz de la Mujer* (1907), and *Paso de Norte* (1910) both published in El Paso, Texas, among many others documented this event. Other newspapers from period three include, *El Ranchero* (1857) from Matamoros, Tamaulipas, *The Morning Star* (1864) published in Monterrey, Nuevo León, *Eco del Valle* (1905) from Las Cruces, New Mexico, *El Demócrata Fronterizo* (1917) published in Laredo, Texas, *La Voz de Tijuana* (1925) from Tijuana, Baja California, and *Cronista del Valle* (1930) published in Brownsville, Texas. These were some of the periodicals that documented events and information related to period three.

Scholarship, collaborations, and challenges

The inclusion of periodicals from the borderland into a digital map gives access to broader literary material with interdisciplinary significances to academic researchers and borderlands communities. As previously mentioned, the project is crucial for research because it provides an extensive repertoire to understand the borderlands. Currently, the BAC project is utilized for a linguistic study titled, “The Translation Practices of Spanish-language Newspapers Published in the US Borderlands Between 1808 and 1930,” by Laura Gasca, that describes and analyzes the translation and bilingual practices in these newspapers. Additionally, the inclusion of recovered newspapers in the dissertation titled, *Mexican and Mexican-American Fronteriza Writers: A Counter Discourse from a Militarized Border*, challenges the silencing in the historical discourse, a form of decolonial imaginary, which Emma Pérez describes as a rupturing space, “the alternative to that which is written in history... To decolonize our history and our historical imaginations, we must uncover the voices from the past that honor multiple experiences, instead of ... allowing the white colonial heteronormative gaze to reconstruct and interpret our past” (123). In *Genealogía transfronteriza: la resistencia de los sujetos de la frontera entre México-Estados Unidos*, the presence of feminist discourses and the representation of women found in the borderlands newspapers articles inquire “women’s historical struggles in appropriating a discursive voice to document their social contribution” (Lomas ix) that has been hidden, erased, or manipulated by hegemonic and patriarchal discourses. These practices tend to marginalize border women’s subjectivity. As of now, BAC has proven to be a useful tool for analysis and research as demonstrated in the mentioned scholarly works. Gradually, BAC’s missions are being reach while the project continues to work on building bridges globally among the academic and borderlands communities.

For the BAC project to reach a global platform, a website was created to facilitate the access the borderlands’ archive. BAC’s website displays the digital map, additional information of online sources, an archivists and project collaborator’s directory, among other resources. An additional website will be hosted by the Recovery Program, which will display BAC’s periodicals exhibitions. Additionally, social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are used to reach students, academics, and the communities to engage in borderlands conversations, keep them informed of new material, and create networks across borders. Since BAC was conceived, the founders were aware of the importance to represent

the borderlands culture, which meant having a bilingual platform; therefore, BAC's online presence is displayed in Spanish and English.

In conclusion, BAC as a digital humanities project benefits from different knowledges since different skills are essential for it to be accessible for research and engagement. In the case of BAC, the integration of newspapers from the borderlands has become a new digital archive. As Roopika Risam emphasizes, these types of texts can aid in the theorizing of digital archival practices (Professionalizing via DH). Unlike individual research in the humanities, the integration of digital procedures requires collective work. An individual approach in a field that involves different skills is unmanageable; therefore, working together with other specialists can have a productive effect in the development and results. Aside from an interdisciplinary and collective approach, collaboration is crucial. The responsibilities and contributions from each individual, facilitates the working process and illustrates multidisciplinary approaches. This project builds on the direct and indirect work of specialists such as Carolina Villarroel, Gabriela Baeza Ventura, Nicolás Kanellos, Lisa Cruces, archivists and scholars, as well as, the extensive work done by Research Fellows and student workers in the Recovery Program, Hispanic Special Collection, among other centers. With the forthcoming debut of the Digital Humanities Research Center for US Latina/o Studies hosted by the Recovery Program⁵, BAC becomes its first digital humanities project created by native borderlands Latinas doctoral students, Maira E. Álvarez and Sylvia A. Fernández. Even with all the innovative benefits that digital humanities offer, as previously mentioned, there are still challenges to confront. Unfortunately, the lack of funds and institutional resources make it difficult for scholars and researchers to develop their digital projects. Gathering, documenting, and organizing the data can take time, as well as learning to work the digital tools needed. Therefore, the success to sustain projects, such as BAC, lies in creating and supporting interdisciplinary alliances and digital humanities communities across borders.

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⁵ For detail information about the center see, "Centro de recuperación de la herencia literaria hispana en los Estados Unidos" by Gabriela Baeza Ventura, Ph. D. and Carolina Villarroel, Ph.D.

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