Landscapes of Violence
An Interdisciplinary Journal Devoted to the Study of Violence, Conflict, and Trauma

Volume 2
Number 1 *Stolen People, Stolen Land, Stolen Identity: Negotiating the Labyrinth of Anglo-American Culture and Law*

Article 6

3-9-2012

Violence as Communication: The Revolt of La Ascensión, Chihuahua (1892)

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Recommended Citation
Hernandez, Jose Angel PhD (2012) "Violence as Communication: The Revolt of La Ascensión, Chihuahua (1892)," *Landscapes of Violence*: Vol. 2: No. 1, Article 6.
Available at: http://scholarworks.umass.edu/lov/vol2/iss1/6

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Violence as Communication: The Revolt of La Ascensión, Chihuahua (1892)

Cover Page Footnote
Various parts of this essay were presented at the following workshops and conferences for their thoughts, suggestions, and critiques are greatly appreciated: XIII Reunión de Historiadores de México, Estados Unidos y Canadá; The Five College Faculty History Seminar at Amherst College (2008); The National Association for Chicana & Chicano Studies Conference (2006); The Annual Mellon Conference on Latin American History at Yale University (2006); The Social Science Association (2006); and The Latin American History Workshop at The University of Chicago (2006). At various stages of writing and research, John Flores (Case Western Reserve), Pablo Ben (SDSU), Emilio Kouri (Chicago), Friedrich Katz (Chicago), Ramon Solorzano (UMASS), Claudio Lomnitz (Columbia), and especially Jaime Pensado (Notre Dame), provided invaluable feedback, critiques, and suggestions. I have tried my best to incorporate these particularities, however, all mistakes are my own.

This article is available in Landscapes of Violence: http://scholarworks.umass.edu/lov/vol2/iss1/6

INTRODUCTION

Although described as "regional occurrence" the 1892 Revolt of La Ascensión shares a historiography that is emplotted as one of rebellion and nationalism. (Almada 1964:93-106; Pozo Marrero 1991:104, 125; Ramírez Caloca 1944:245-260). It continues to be a source of interest to historians, even as various government officials during the period questioned the very "transnationality" of this "motín" by arguing that the revolt of La Ascensión was of a local nature. Or following the words telegraphed to President Díaz by way of Chihuahua's Governor, Lauro Carrillo's description of the "riot" immediately after it surfaced in 1892: "in reality the incident of La Ascensión has no other character than that of a vile revenge exercised against the president, and two most cowardly and treacherous murders; but because of the rest, there is no political cause nor revolutionary goals, nor have these men been in combination with any outside elements" (Colección Porfirio Díaz 1892h).1 This observation is understandable given the source of the citation; however, given the other factors discussed, a historical analysis cannot afford to take these observations as all encompassing.

When examining "The Revolt of La Ascensión, 1892" past historiographical interpretations serve as examples of the theoretical traps that are succumbed to when employing modes of analysis that are inappropriate for studying this particular repatriate colony. The trope that is read throughout these historiographical examples is evident because they share the notion that this event can be termed pre-political and primitive. It will become patently clear that terms such as "pre-political," "primitive," and "unorganized" are outdated and require alternative methods of postcolonial analysis. An illustrative example can be read in a study by Acalia Pozo Marrero. When explaining the motivations of the revolt, she outlines the imposition of a Porfirian official and concludes in her thesis that "As it happens with the majority of mass phenomena, the colonists acted in spontaneous manner before a direct aggression. The crowd was out of control, perhaps basically interested in putting in practice a species of natural justice." Moreover, she considers the "riot of La Ascensión as a spontaneous incident that did not meet the principal characteristics of a fully developed social movement: leadership, organization and ideology" (Pozo Marrero 1991:104 & 125, emphasis added). The historian and founding member of the Subaltern Studies Collective, Ranajit Guha, reminds the researcher "in many instances, they (peasants) tried first to obtain justice from the authorities by deputation, petition, and peaceful demonstration and took up arms only as a last resort when all other means had failed" (Guha 1983:9). What historians

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1 Original: "En realidad el incidente de La Ascensión no tiene otro carácter que el de una venganza ruin ejercida contra el presidente, y dos asesinatos mas cobardes alevosos; pero por lo demás, no hay ninguna causa política ni miras revolucionarias, ni han estado estos hombres en combinación con elemento alguno de fuera." "Colección Porfirio Díaz" hereafter abbreviated to "CPD"

of this revolt have overlooked, therefore, is the long history of problems and frauds experienced by the dozens of land owners in La Ascensión.

As way to contradict and compliment this scant literature, the following examines the revolt of La Ascensión in 1892 by analyzing heretofore unexamined regional and federal archives that discuss this event in some detail. After glossing over the details of this event and the brutal killing of three government officials in this repatriate colony, I proceed to examine the state's efforts at quelling this rebellion and their attempt to capture and extradite those rebels that migrated back to the US with the argument that they were not Mexican citizens, but American citizens that earlier migrated to the colony after an election riot twenty years earlier. This event forced the hand of the government to enter the colony and scientifically survey the lands under dispute and then tried to extradite those individuals now claiming US citizenship. Where these repatriates were once cast as the very agents of modernity that would return to settle and develop the frontier with skills and techniques learned in the US, they were subsequently recast as ungrateful "Bad Mexicans…the kind that are raised in the United States who then return talking negatively about their country"(CPD 1892a).

Research in regional archives, more importantly, provide for a closer reading of the material, particularly coroner's reports that detail the various ways in which the victims were tortured and executed. Given the historical background that led to these events, I suggest that the violent events of this particular revolt can be read as expressions of frustration, anger, and therefore constitute a form of communication.

THE LINCHAMIENTO OF RAFAEL ANCHETA[2]

At five o'clock in the afternoon on January 6, 1892, following the New Year's celebrations that took place less than a week earlier, one hundred armed men gathered themselves behind the Church to confront the newly elected Municipal President of La Ascensión, Chihuahua. Armed, angered, and intoxicated, the residents of this small town situated on the Chihuahua-New Mexico borderlands sought to question the legitimacy of Rafael Ancheta's election victory over the preferred and more popular José León Urrutía—the independent candidate. When warned of the emergent rebellion, Ancheta walked over to the Molino (mill) with several armed men to inquire about their reunion, only to be chastised by local

[2] My use of the term "Linchamiento" is taken from contemporary usage of the term, which does not always entail a lynching per se, which is to say with a rope or some other device where the victim is hung from a tree, telephone or telegraph pole, etc. Linchamientos in contemporary Mexico involve not just public lynchings, put public beatings, and killings that manifest various forms of violence and death. Today, these killings average about 25 per year. See Vilas, "(In) justicia por mano propia," 131-160.

inhabitants who claimed that he should not be president and that they had gathered to "un-recognize his authority" (Archivo Municipal de Ciudad Juárez 1892f).3

In the argument that ensued between Ancheta and the rebels, Atilano Baca added: "you are nothing more than an infamous ingrate that wants to be an authority by force" while Ancheta replied that the law had legally elected him to be President of the municipality (AMCJ 1892g).4 Between the words and the angry crowd, Ancheta was knocked unconscious with a rifle butt to the head and then dragged to a mill owned by Remigio Saenz situated just outside the colony (Pozo Marrero 1991:105). One of the police accompanying him, José Ávalos Salazar, was gravely wounded and barely managed to escape and walk over the home of Marcos Sifuentes, where he later died that evening (AMCJ 1892a). As they dragged Ancheta with a rope, several men beat him and kicked him as they made their way to the mill where more torture, gunshots, beatings, and humiliations would follow. In the meantime, local prisoners, some of which were related to the rebellious repatriates, were also released from the local jail without resistance from the guards (AMCJ 1892j).

When the "addicts of the government" were warned of the "tumult," they immediately sent word to the local and state officials, who then relayed this latest of news to President Díaz (CPD 1892j). But while Díaz received word and organized federal forces from the capital of Mexico, a local militia of about 39 men from Janos and about 50 from Corralitos and Colonia Díaz were already on their way to La Ascensión that same evening, making preparations in the home of Sifuentes, the "Post Office Master" (AMCJ 1892b). As the group charged the fortified mill the following morning, the "revoltosos" defended their position within the walls of the Molino and repelled the attack. In the process, they killed Sifuentes in the first volley and then finished off his horse on the second and third barrages.

With such a well-fortified position, the number of revoltosos increased to well over 130 men as federal forces arrived almost five days later. On the second day, the colony's overseer, Ángel Bouquet, sent a telegram to the *Jefe* Politico requesting assistance from his own fortified position in the Customs House. The revoltosos, according to Bouquet's choppy telegram, "…continue re-concentrated in the mill and appears to be under attack; I occupy customs house and other houses; to avoid more inconveniences to the populace, aid is urgently needed; I don't understand object of riot…expect to be attacked" (AMCJ 1892c).

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3 "Archivo Municipal de Ciudad Juárez" hereafter abbreviated to "AMCJ."

4 A Municipal President can be compared to the contemporary role that a town mayor undertakes.

The increase in the number of rebels according to R. Sánchez Aldana, who was in charge of the jailhouse, was due to the incorporation of prisoners who later joined the "mob." Aldama appears to have conceded to the demands of his captors when he stated that "...I tried to proceed against these individuals because of the threats made against me and I noticed that there were others outside of the court that accompanied them, and when I left I found no one I could trust to ask for help, because I noticed in these individuals that they had made some arrangement that gave the results of what happened today…" (AMCJ 1892j).

The description above alludes to an atmosphere surely in favor of the "revoltosos," one that was likely to occur in a situation where "individuals had made some arrangement," especially since they were able to release prisoners from the local jail with no resistance. As these events unfolded, Ancheta continued getting beat with fists, sticks, and rifle butts, until his agony was finally ended with a pickaxe to the right side of his head. In the end, three government officials lost their lives.

Once federal forces appeared in La Ascensión at 2 a.m. on the 11th of January, in the form of Díaz's own Godson Agustín Sangines, the "revoltosos" continued in their rebellion but by that time had already claimed three lives. When Sangines awoke that morning, he sent word to the "pronounced" to surrender to the government, only to discover that there was no one at the mill (AMCJ 1892e). Scouts were immediately sent out and sixty men were arrested while another forty ran towards El Cerro de la Cal (The Mountains of la Cal). The remainder of the lot, particularly the main conspirators, fled across the border to Las Cruces and La Mesilla, New Mexico and would later claim US citizenship once the process of extradition began.

The reaction and response of the government to this latest of rebellions was quick, calculated and ultimately effective, at least this time around. Marred in a confrontation with numerous rebellions throughout the republic, the "Revuelta de La Ascensión" was handled in a diplomatic, if somewhat necessary manner that took into account the nature, context, and ultimate outcome of the revolt into consideration (see Katz and Dale-Lloyd 1986:11). Even as Sangines made his way to the colony and pondered the possibility of visiting violence upon the rebellious repatriates, he was compelled to consider the possible consequences of his actions and the grist he could offer to the enemies of the Mexican government (AMCJ 1892e). He knew that his reaction, or approach to the rebellion, might well arouse other rebellions or supply negative press for those enemies of the state currently in open revolt.

During this three year period (1891-1893), as Historian Friedrich Katz has pointed out, "the greatest number of insurrections happened during the Porfirian dictatorship prior to the Revolution of 1910. In many cases, like in the center of

Mexico and in the mountainous zones of western Chihuahua, the revolutions happened in the same regions and places where twenty years earlier the first buds of the Revolution would take place" (Katz and Dale-Lloyd 1986:11). In the end, of the dozens of participants involved in the revolt, only four would be sentenced to capital punishment while the others were pardoned and subsequently had their land titles rectified by a government-sponsored survey. (Archivo Histórico de Terrenos Nacionales 1893b).[5]

The public lynching of Ancheta was essentially the culmination of a series of frustrations that had at their roots the fight over lands and titling of the same. The election of Ancheta exacerbated an already tense situation due to his own questionable past while administering the public affairs of the colony during his previous tenure as Municipal President. What ensued in this confrontation between the local inhabitants of La Ascensión and the representatives of local and federal power was not only the killing of three government officials in this border region, but the incident also spurred the government to rectify the unending complaints regarding land displacement by dubious government officials. Like similar cases involving land disputes, the federal government entered this particular colony to rectify the endless stream of complaints by local colonists to address the problems associated with land surveys, displacement at the hands of federal officials appointed to these districts, water rights, and titles to their properties. The matters outlined here were the principal concerns of the inhabitants of La Ascensión in their correspondence to the federal government in the years prior to the *linchamiento* (public lynching) of Ancheta.

ANCHETA'S PAST AND DEATH DESCRIBED

Unlike other cases where local villagers may have rebelled against the imposition of Porfirian authorities, the election victory of Ancheta was not truly a "Porfirian imposition" per se, even though Ancheta was—as one telegram described him—one of their own and therefore part of the Porfirian apparatus (CPD 1892k).[6] Although not an "original settler," Ancheta was a well-known member of La Ascensión who ran for office in the past and held the post of Municipal President on at least one other occasion. During his tenure as past *Presidente,* some Porfirian authorities commented that Ancheta formerly abused of his own authority on more than one occasion. According to Miguel Ahumada's knowledge of the "people of the

[5] "Copia autorizada de las diligencias de identificación de las mojoneras reconocidas por el Ing. E. Hijar y Haro en la colonia de La Ascensión, 1893."

[6] In this telegram to Díaz just two days after the revolt began, Sangines incorrectly pointed out that "Han muerto cinco de los nuestros," a number that would later be reduced to three government officials. What is interesting to note, as the chapter will illustrate, is that although Ancheta et. all are described as "nuestros" in the aftermath and although the colony is described in glowing terms in the initial phases of settlement, the language describing this colony will negatively shift thereafter.

frontier," the motive that "occasioned the rebellion of the people of La Ascensión was the ill will they felt toward Ancheta; hence, this was a man of bad antecedents, who three or four years ago, being also an authority in the same place, harassed in a very palpable way, the employees of the frontier customs house who resided there, placing difficulties for its good administration…hence, did the spirit of discord and disagreement amongst his neighbors dominate him." (CPD 1892a).

But it was not only his neighbors that felt alienated, according to some local officials that noted Ancheta's involvement in the selling of fictitious titles to Mr. Thompson, an American rancher that later accumulated a substantial amount of property in northern Chihuahua (AHTN 1884).[7] Later, Ancheta will also conspire with Ángel Bouquet to dispossess a number of repatriates by offering protection and support to the latter. The violence that would eventually visit Ancheta in early January was due not only to his past participation in suspicious activities, but ultimately owing to his present collaboration with Bouquet. The dubious surveying of the colony's lands resulted in a confrontation where several dozen colonists rebelled against the colony's overseer for acquiring lands in a questionable manner. It is in this dispute that we must consider the killing of Ancheta. His election victory was simply the proverbial straw that broke the burro's back.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE KILLINGS

The details surrounding the humiliation, beating, and ultimate death of Ancheta are revealed to us for the first time because of eyewitness accounts extracted from participants of this particular local revolt. Or, following the words of Shahid Amin, "the speech of humble folk is not normally recorded for posterity, it is wrenched from them in courtrooms and inquisitorial trials" (Amin 1995:1-6). Eyewitness testimonies recovered and recorded in La Ascensión just weeks after the revolt and the details contained in the archival record tell us much about local feelings toward Ancheta the person, thus complementing previous historiographies that overlooked these regional particulars (Almada 1964:93-106; Pozo Marrero 1991:104 & 125; Ramírez Caloca 1944:245-260).

Unlike public executions where the person on trial is relieved of his position with an instant death, Ancheta was not simply shot, nor merely lynched, or for that matter banished from the community when "they beat him in an atrocious manner." Each of these acts of brutality and the violence visited upon the body involved a conscious performance that is embedded with meaning and particular messages. The written record bears repeating when officials describe the killings as the "most treacherous and cowardly assassinations" (CPD 1892i).

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[7] "Colonia de La Ascensión. El gobernador del Estado remite una solicitud de los pobladores del Valle de la Ascensión quienes piden terrenos para informar una Colonia."

But even though the death was brutal and "atrocious," the killing and the manner in which Ancheta was killed illustrate a level of calculated violence that requires some analysis. My intention is neither to glorify violence nor to shock with the archival record, only to demonstrate that this rebellion was not a spontaneous and disorganized event, but one that is a calculated and conscious demonstration with intended consequences. The violence that Ancheta receives is part and parcel of these conscious acts of resistance. The manner in which someone is killed is subject to the same examination as an act of resistance: hence, violence is communication.

According to the sworn testimony by Dr. Montero's examination of José Ávalos Salazar's body, the coroner reveals he died as a result of a bullet wound fired from a 44 Caliber (AMCJ 1892i). The other government official killed in the process was Marcos Sifuentes who was also shot by "a bullet in the chest that deprived him of life, passing through the left lung..." (AMCJ 1892i). The killing of Ancheta, by contrast, would not be simple or merciful.

Unlike the single gunshot deaths that Sifuentes and Ávalos Salazar received, the coroner's report on Ancheta reveals a much more systematic, calculated, and organized public execution. It is one intended to send a message and to voice public outrage for an issue that had been manipulated, coerced, and ultimately (perceived by the people of La Ascensión) legitimized politically by the Mexican government when Ancheta was "elected" as the Municipal President in late 1891.

In the coroner's report describing the deaths of these three government officials, the doctor in charge noted that Ancheta was tortured before he was killed. Sifuentes and Ávalos were shot once. It would appear that the intent was to kill them quickly (even if that was not the result in the case of the latter). The intent in the case of Ancheta, on the other hand, was clearly to prolong his suffering. Ancheta was the only one dragged from the first group that initially confronted the "pronounced" behind the church and he was also to be shot three times and beaten to the point where the physician could not make out where one bruise ended and another began; as the doctor noted in his report: "on his back were also noted various contusions without being able to describe each one separately because of their great number, thus all his back was bruised by blows." His left leg had been dislocated as well as his left foot. His neck and wrists were also scarred as if tied by a thick rope and threatened with public lynching, or used to drag him to their desired location. These neck, wrist burns, and bruises were probably caused during Ancheta's trek toward the mill of Remigio Saenz.

The shots fired at Ancheta numbered three but did not end up killing him. They only served to cause him more pain. One of the bullets entered his chest on the left side and exited on the right (just under the collarbone) while another bullet entered his abdominal area on the left side and then exited on the right. The last of the three

shots fired ended up on his left leg just above the knee, which probably made no difference since his left leg and left foot were already dislocated. There was a profound lesion on the right side of his face and his eyes, lip, and face were very swollen. Much like his back, according to the doctor, his face was also heavily bruised (AMCJ 1892i). And although the doctor believed that the wound on the right side of his face to be the result of gunshot flesh wound, eyewitness reports tell us that it was most likely an axe being wielding by one of the land claimants, Julian Pérez .[8]

The individuals that witnessed the death of Ancheta also provide the testimony that this narrative is built upon. It should be noted that many of those involved would eventually renounce their participation in the rebellion when they pleaded with the state governor for leniency in the days following the killing. Lauro Carrillo points out in his telegram to Díaz, "an emissary from the insurgents of La Ascensión has presented themselves unto me at this very moment declaring that [the revolt was] due to misfortune, whose consequences they could not predict" (CPD 1892h). Once federal forces arrived to quell the uprising, many of the inhabitants were willing to provide testimony to the military officials taking note of the revolt (see Vanderwood 1998). One of the most descriptive of the lot would be Canuto Montano's testimony that was cited earlier. His testimony is further corroborated with other accounts from regional, federal, and insider perspectives, not to mention historical memory.

Montano was 45 years of age, a married laborer and a neighbor of the municipality. When asked where he was between the 6th and 9th of January, Montano responded that he witnessed persons headed over to the mill, some of which were mounted atop of horses. As a participant of the event, he recognized Marcos Sifuentes who was later shot by those persons inside of the mill. But as he looked into the vicinity of the mill, he could see a wounded Ancheta lying there as Juan Mestas, Bernardo Duran, Decidero Chávez, Félix Lara, Francisco Sainz, and Julián Pérez "took him outside and shot at him." While Ancheta was gravely wounded and lying down in pain, he pleaded with his captors to bring over his only daughter. According to Montano's testimony, Ancheta requested "that they take over his daughter in order to give her a blessing," and that afterwards Desiderio Chávez pulled out his "member" and told Ancheta "here is your daughter" while he urinated on him. Thereafter Julian Pérez hit Ancheta with a pickaxe to the head. The others subsequently discarded the body by the aqueduct and continued with their activities (AMCJ 1892h).

Now the aforementioned description is worth going over in order to analyze such an extended display of commentary on behalf of the witness being questioned.

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[8] Pérez will eventually be sentenced to "Capital Punishment" for his involvement in this revolt.

For one, the disrespect given to this man is apparent, but also intended to relay a message to Ancheta, especially during this moment of death. When Ancheta asks his captors to bring his daughter in order that he might give her a blessing, and perhaps even vice-versa (that she might give him a blessing as well), he is told by another, while displaying his "member" to Ancheta, that "here is your daughter."

The reference to "here is your daughter" is intended as a double entendre. On the one hand, the insulting reference to the man's penis and Ancheta's daughter insinuates a sexual connotation of sorts by suggesting that his daughter will surely also be given her own "blessing" as soon as Ancheta is dead. When Ancheta asks for the others to fetch his daughter, Desiderio Chávez displays his penis while simultaneously mocking his victim with "here is your daughter," and then urinating on him. In this humiliating state, even the last vestiges of an honorable death are reduced to lasting insults that are intended to further insult and agonize the victim.

The varied forms of wounds, lacerations, and gunshots are also telling for this particular case, since they also suggest that the death of Ancheta was intended to be painful and degrading. Earlier I suggested that the other two victims, Sifuentes and Ávalos, died from mortal gunshot wounds to their bodies. If people wanted an open casket during the funeral, the face and the body would be displayable since they were not attacked with the viciousness and brutality received by Ancheta. By contrast, the body of Ancheta was dragged, beaten, and severely maimed, thus preventing the display of his body prior to burial. His face was so severely beaten, bruised, and swollen, that an open display of the body would have surely terrified those relatives and friends looking to give their last respects. During that period, bodies of the deceased were usually prepared for burial inside of homes and family members were expected to come and pay their last respects in the days prior to the actual burial (Will de Chaparro 2004). The repeated attacks upon Ancheta's person, as well, suggest an anger and furor that was satiated only with the final blow of the pickaxe to the head, a scene quite reminiscent of the process just twenty years beforehand in La Mesilla in 1871—when John Lemmon would receive a blow to the head with an axe being wielded by a Democratic opponent.

THE QUELLING OF THE REVOLTOSOS

The quelling of the revolt begins, paradoxically, not on the day of the revolt, but in the weeks prior to the actual event. It seemed as though Ancheta could tell the future and foresee the death that awaited him later on that evening...at five in the afternoon…when he wrote this final account. In his last letter to the *Jefe Politico* of Ciudad Juárez, and perhaps the last written statement about the social and tumultuous conditions of La Ascensión prior to his death, Ancheta described how past crimes remained unsolved due to the lack of a police presence in that area. The need for a substantial police force would not only assist in the investigation and

enforcement of the laws, but would also serve as a deterrent for those "malefactors" who saw the proximity of the border as a license to live out their bad lives along the Chihuahuan frontier.

The main purpose of this "last testament," written only five days after taking office, indicated the need for a police outfit or unit to enforce the laws of the land in order that they be respected. A detachment of twenty-five men would provide local authorities with an effective means to enforce those guarantees that the law provides (AMCJ 1892d). The letter was sent on the very day that this Municipal President met his death by those very individuals that he believed mocked the law and then migrated north across the border in search of refuge. Ancheta justifies the need for policing units by outlining a number of crimes committed in the colony in recent memory.

The crimes committed in La Ascensión during the past few months, according to Ancheta, warranted the letter requesting the establishment of a significant police force. It should also be noted here that Ancheta already knew he was being targeted by disgruntled colonists and that rumors of a confrontation based largely on past disagreements would soon come to the fore following the New Year's celebrations. Colonists had earlier questioned the veracity of the election results at the end of November in 1891. The timing is significant for explaining the death of Ancheta and two other government officials assigned to that colony. For one, Ancheta had recently been elected as the Municipal President of that colony, and his supporters were the local elite and Bouquet—the very individual causing so much trouble with the land surveys and who accumulated a small fortune at the expense of the colonists of La Ascensión (see AHTN 1888a).

According to Ancheta, not so long ago an armed assault against an elderly man by the name of Arcadio Carvajal went unpunished because of a need for a well-organized policing body to persecute those malefactors that in only a few hours "trespass the frontiers of the country." A bit later an assassination attempt was visited upon one Cecilio Guigon, whose left arm was apparently "torn to pieces" by a bullet fired from outside his home and that penetrated his door. The wound, in Ancheta's words, caused grave injury and the crime remained unsolved because of the same reasons: that there is no police unit to persecute the criminals that carried out these crimes (AMCJ 1892d). What he made mention of twice was the proximity of the border to the town of La Ascensión and the relative ease of escaping to the other side without worry about reprisals from either US or Mexican authorities.

Ancheta's description of this situation is worth going over in some detail if only to contextualize his final report. The fact of being in a "settlement that was isolated in a desert and next to the American frontier makes this place more purposefully for those people of bad living to commit crimes that almost always remain enveloped in

a most irritating impunity," is some of the detail that Ancheta was trying to relay in his letter (AMCJ 1892d). The relative isolation of this new settlement along the northern frontier also gave the geographical locale an air of "impunity" whereby the vast and open terrain provided for a sense of distance and therefore freedom from centralized authority.

Thus Ancheta's purpose was three fold: to request a detachment of twenty-five men; to highlight the crimes committed in the past and therefore justify his request by outlining these two examples; and finally, to illustrate how the isolation of the town, coupled with the close proximity of the border, facilitated and engendered crimes for those people that enjoyed "bad living." His requests were for not. The attachment of 25 men that Ancheta asked for only arrived after the lynching that claimed his life.

The response from the administration, although swift and effective, was too late to save the life of Ancheta. Telegrams sent immediately after the outbreak of the rebellion in La Ascensión illustrates the gravity of the situation as Díaz wastes little time in orchestrating the response to quell the uprising of the borderlands. But the state response to this particular situation can be broken down into a number of simple processes that serve to disrupt, capture, and then ultimately "clean up" the rebellion with a discursive device intended to further quell the contagion of rebellion to other colonies, towns, and potential rebels in the area. The first step was the well-linked communicative apparatus from the border to the periphery, beginning with Lechuga's first report to the Jefe Politico, followed by the military orchestration from the area, and then finalized by the extradition of the rebels.

The first process of controlling and containing the revolt entailed both military and discursive elements that are intended to silence any and all opposition to the regime, whether from within or from without. The military quelling of the rebels will subsequently be accompanied by complementary rhetorical moves employed in the aftermath of the revolt when the main protagonists of this border tragedy will seek immunity across the borders and claim US citizenship.

Recasting the Repatriates: From Repatriating Modernity to Repatriating Revolt

Following here on the anthropological field work done by Ana María Alonso's historical ethnography of Namiquipa, I argue that the Ascensiónenses were cast as ingrates and drunkards after the rebellion, whereas beforehand they were seen as the "agents of modernization" and colonists that would populate the frontier regions and ward off the "Apache menace"—the symbol of "barbarity" during that period. Or to use Alonso's apt wording with respect to the Namiquipans, the "one-time agents of 'civilization'…subsequently became redefined by the state and elites as

obstacles to 'order' and 'progress' " (Alonso 1995:7). In much the same vein, the people of La Ascensión would be framed in negative terms where in the previous generation they were imagined as "modern" stalwarts of modernity and progress. Their repatriation, it was believed, would help to modernize the country and populate the northern regions.

This framing that Alonso describes needs to be considered in the moment and in line with the contextual surroundings having to do with rebellion and insurrection along the frontier. Not only was Díaz being bombarded by nationwide revolts, but the border also served as a source of real tension for his regime, particularly given the openness of the frontier and the access to arms (for border unrest, see Dorado Romo 2005; Katz and Dale-Lloyd 1986; Vanderwood 1998; Young 2004). Revolutionary journalists and politically minded Mexican American circles across the border served as a refuge for political prisoners, but neighboring Mexican-origin communities had long ago become safe places of exile for many a revolutionary looking to overthrow the Díaz regime.

When the colonists first arrived in this area their colonization of the area was seen in terms of *realpolitik* coupled with a healthy dose of nationalist rhetoric. The granting of water, wood, and land rights to the colony of La Ascensión was done at the expense of two minor landowners of the area. The justification of the engineer sent to survey and then grant titles to said property noted quite matter-of-factly the importance of repatriating so many Mexicans that reside in foreign territory because their presence would serve to "augment the number of arms, of creating new settlements, of populating our borders, and of impeding the invasions of the savages..." (AHTN 1888b).[9] Early on, the repatriate colony of La Ascención was described as one of the "successes" of The Department of Development (Fomento), prompting Díaz to state that it "would become one of the most important towns in the north" (González Navarro 1960:121)

These expectations were for not once news surfaced that the people of La Ascensión were in open revolt against regional authorities. When Miguel Ahumada relayed his explanation of the events that unfolded in La Ascensión on January 6, 1892, based on his extensive knowledge of the "people of the frontier," the highest ranking military official of the area explained that the rebellion was caused "by a bad Mexican, the kind that are raised in the United States who then return talking negatively about their country" (CPD 1892a).[10] The revolt only a week later was

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[9] "Los colonos de La Ascensión, Chihuahua piden se les asegure la propiedad de las aguas de 'La Palotada' y 'Rancho Esparseño', 1887."

[10] Original: "...un mal mexicano de esos que se crían en los Estados Unidos y regresan expresándose mal de su país."

portrayed in a less temperate tone with the governor's own analysis of the repatriate rebellion when he noted "the uprising of La Ascensión was originated by drunkenness and probably some advice from Lic. Urrutia without the intention that things would reached the proportions of a crime" (CPD 1892b; CPD 1892f). Sangines chimed in with his own observation of the events and the inhabitants of the area by generalizing in *toto* that "...the major part of the incited pertain to that class of people that go wherever life takes them" (CPD 1892f).

To further marginalize and reframe this group as a "class of people that go wherever life takes them," Sangines sought to historicize the event almost two months after the revolt in an extended letter to his Godfather. In that letter Sangines began with the founding of the repatriate colony in the following terms: "It has been about twenty years that there was a riot in La Mesilla, because of some elections, which resulted in some deaths. This caused a considerable number of individuals that partook in the aforementioned riot to emigrate from the neighboring Republic and come to our country; these individuals were established in what is today La Ascensión, in an extension of five sitios of land that was donated to them by the Government" (CPD 1892g). Here, the 1892 revolt is collapsed alongside that of 1871, thus suggesting that there was something endemic about this "rebellious repatriate colony" and make them appear as criminals before the "crime" is even committed.

The founding of the colony is no longer lauded as a benefit to the "nation" but as part of a rebellious pathology shared by those "bad Mexican(s), the kind that are raised in the United States who then return talking negatively about their country" (CPD 1892a). The Governor of the state of Chihuahua added to this trope of "pathological rebelliousness," moreover, "I have knowledge that that same colony when they came to Mexico, did so fleeing 'Las Cruces' due to an identical event that they executed with the local judge" (CPD 1892e). To elaborate on each and every negative adjective, much less each rhetorical move would belabor my point here.[11]

The point of this paragraph is simply to illustrate how a once promising repatriate colony is quickly demonized and marginalized by those in power once their usefulness has been exhausted, or until their behavior is considered threatening. The subsequent flight of the main protagonists of this revolt will ultimately lead the Porfirian administration into the messy diplomatic arena of extradition politics. The

[11] The "naming" of events is important for all concerned. As I've mentioned before, the revolt was given many names and described in a number of ways: Motín, Tumulto, Revuelta, Sedición, Revoltosos, Tumultuosos, Sediciosos, Bandidos, Criminales Comunes, Azotea, Azoteo, Borrachera, and Asonada. Each of the terms, of course, is intended to relay a message about where those in power stand vis-à-vis rebels and opponents of the nation state.

continued condemnation of the repatriates will serve to expedite the re-re-repatriation (or extradition) of these particular repatriates.

THE FLIGHT TO LA MESILLA AND RECTIFICATION OF SURVEYS

After the revolt the main authors of Ancheta's death flee across the border to various points in southern New Mexico and claim US citizenship. They are subsequently extradited when it is proven that residency status and, in many cases political participation in local politics, belied any claims to US citizenship. In the end, all but Remigio Saenz will fail in their fights against extradition to Mexico. Only Saenz will succeed but will ultimately be captured during a visit to La Ascensión.

Back in the colony of La Ascensión, an Engineer is sent to conduct a "scientific survey" to inspect and rectify the dubious land surveys of Bouquet. Earlier surveys are also corrected and illustrated by the new survey. In the end, Ing. Hijar y Haro concludes three items in his final report.

With the arrival of Sangines to the colony almost five days after it began, the rebels fled in all directions north and south of La Ascensión. Around 35-40 of these men fled to El Cerro de la Cal while from 55-60 were later arrested, tried, and subsequently exonerated of their role in the events of January 6, 1892. Several others fled across the border and claim US citizenship as a way to try and avoid extradition to Mexico. Among those that fled across the border, we know of Jesús Sillas, Remigio Saenz, Pedro Mendoza, Félix Lara, Pablo Lechuga, Atilano Baca, Severo Rubio, Joaquín Jimenez, and Francisco Luna, most of which were later caught and held in the jailhouse in Las Cruces, New Mexico. E. Provencio, the Political Chief of Ciudad Juárez, traveled directly to where a number of these rebels were jailed in Las Cruces and wrote directly to Carrillo regarding the possibility that they might claim US citizenship.

When Provencio arrived in Las Cruces to claim the rebels and have them returned to Ciudad Juárez for processing, he was told that he would have to wait until it was proven that they were indeed Mexican citizens and not US citizens as they claimed. Even so, the governor of New Mexico assured him that they would be handed over irrespective of their citizenship status, particularly given the nature of the documentation presented. According to Provencio, "after we spoke, he assured me that in light of the documents that the imprisoned would be delivered, but that we had to hear them because they had appealed to Washington alleging to be American citizens" (CPD 1892c). Given the location of this colony, it was further suggested that an outfit of soldiers be stationed at the border to prevent any more flights across (CPD 1892l). Those that managed to get across will take the Mexican government into the messy arena of extradition politics.

The political connections that Remigio Saenz enjoyed when he was a resident of La Mesilla twenty years earlier apparently resurface once more in 1892. Seen as "the most important" of all of the escapees, Saenz had wealth "with which to pay," according to Chihuahua's Governor Lauro Carrillo. Due either to his money or to this political connections Saenz succeeded in claiming US citizenship while the others were eventually extradited to Chihuahua where several faced charges, including capital punishment (CPD 1892d).

But it was not merely a case of claiming US citizenship, but also the double move of including amnesty in their petitions. Amnesty was later denied to all, but Saenz continued to hold on throughout the yearlong process. According to Carrillo, he was able to show the citizenship of each of the rebels, including Saenz' long list of citizenship qualifications—that included ownership of lands, voting record in La Ascensión, and past political offices held in aforementioned location—but the judge continued to grant him opportunities to prove otherwise. The Judge, "…in his eagerness to help in every transaction to Saenz, with which he has to pay, opened avenues so that he could present evidence, and declared that his detention was not prosecuted because he was not implicated in the assassinations of La Ascensión" (CPD 1892d). Eventually Saenz returns to La Ascensión on his own where is later arrested by local authorities.

But with the final extradition of most of the actors, Saenz excluded from this group, their case had apparently also caught the attention of many border Mexicans. Although more research would be required to examine the sentiments of the area and the sort of publicity this case generated in southern New Mexico and west Texas, from observations provided by those agents returning with the extradited, there is evidence to suggest borderlanders were aggravated with this case. According to Sangines' telegram to Díaz suggesting the reinforcement of the border region, "the extradition of the criminals of La Ascensión has exalted the spirit of the Mexicans residing along the border on the American side, and this causes some armed groups to marauder throughout on the side indicated" (CPD 1892m).

It is not surprising to read that armed groups are "marauding" about the border region, particularly given the political turmoil that engulfed the Porfirian administration during this period. Aside from the uproar that the massacre of the *Tomochitecos* caused for Mexicans of the border region, the rebels of La Ascensión were not seen as "criminals, bandits, or assassins." Given the tense situation of border region, even prior to the revolt of 1892, the administration was already in the process of rectifying and addressing some of the concerns. The only problem is that the new surveyor arrived several months later.

RECTIFICATION OF SURVEYS AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BOUQUET'S SURVEY

When a commission was sent to rectify and put into appropriate order, the proper surveying of the lands in the colony of La Ascensión, no less than the Engineer Enrique Hijar y Haro was sent to make sure that the measurements were scientifically and arithmetically accurate. By the end of the year in December of 1892, less than a year after the revolt placed the colony is a state of disarray, the engineer awaited orders and his surveying instrument at the border in order to proceed with the rectification of the lands in question.

When Hijar y Haro requested the surveying plans and methods that Bouquet employed when surveying the lands, and which gave rise to the bloody revolt earlier that year, he was told by the Judge of Ciudad Juárez that the plans were not available. According to the Ingeniero, "…Mr. Angel Bouquet when exhorted and required to deliver the plan of the division of lands of the colony, practiced by him, declared that he had no plan, for that reason complicating the location of plots and solares, hence in the titles sent off there is no data of orientation and besides many colonists that have titles do not completely know the place where their lands are situated" (AHTN 1893a).[12] It seems that much like Saenz had enjoyed the legal protection of authorities in Las Cruces following his capture in the area following the revolt, Bouquet too would capitalize on his "superior connections" in Ciudad Juárez, successfully appealing to his own ignorance of surveying when the lawsuit by the Colonists was prosecuted.

The disappearance of the original surveying done by Bouquet did not interfere nor weaken the resolve of Hijar y Haro as he proceeded to take his own measurements of the colony with respect to the information provided for by the government. After the completion of his own survey, he illustrated for the federal government the erroneous survey that Bouquet undertook and why so many colonists were left out of the original plot granted for by the government. According to the Ingeniero, only a week after his arrival in the colony, "I believe it prudent to evidence this error that seems due to an arithmetic mistake committed by the former overseer of this colony" (AHTN 1893a).

This evidence of "arithmetic mistakes" deliberately employed by Bouquet, although compelling and "scientifically" conclusive by the surveyor's more accurate survey of the colony, was for not. The lawsuit filed by the Colonists of La Ascensión, although detailing the many abuses committed by Bouquet was concluded on a legal technicality, one of which was that Bouquet was not qualified to

[12] "Se Comunica al Ing. Enrique Hijar y Haro para que se practique unas diligencias de rectificación en los terrenos de la Colonia La Ascensión, Chihuahua, 1892-1893.

survey the lands in question and could therefore not be held totally accountable for these "arithmetic mistakes" (AHTN 1893c).[13]

Conclusion and Theoretical Concerns

When examining the historiographical literature on the colony of La Ascensión, the explanation given for this revolt has been one reliant on the model left over by E.J. Hobsbawm. For Pozo Marrero, a "social movement" has to have three characteristics: leadership, ideology, and organization. Although "La Revuelta de La Ascensión" of 1892 meets each of these three stipulations, Pozo Marrero suggests that rebels have not thought out their actions and simply acted in haste—without thought or simply on a whim. The historian and founding member of the Subaltern Studies Collective, Ranajit Guha, reminds the researcher "in many instances, they (peasants) tried first to obtain justice from the authorities by deputation, petition, and peaceful demonstration and took up arms only as a last resort when all other means had failed" (Guha 1983:9).

The title and premise of Hobsbawm's own pioneering and very provocative text in 1959 says much about the content and contention of his own perspective when it comes to analyzing so-called peasant revolts in Europe during the years indicated. The title of the book should cause some historians to pause for a moment to reconsider the wording of his thesis: "Primitive Rebels." The term "primitive" alludes to a person that is "not-yet" modern, but somehow in another "stage" of history whereby some sort of requirement is necessary in order to make those peasants discussed, "not primitive" but actual conscious and politically-minded individuals that perhaps had not enjoyed some of the accouterments of modern, "civil society." The subtitle of the text also provides us with an introductory dose of how the author imagines social rebellions in other locales and in other times not conveniently fitted within his Marxist paradigm by labeling these "forms" of resistance as "archaic" and therefore integrated into the pre-historical period before "modernity" arrived to make them "modern" and therefore "up to date." (Chakrabarty 2000:11-16).

Hobsbawm argues in his introduction that the cases that he seeks to examine are for the most part pre-political and therefore have not reached political consciousness—in the "western" modality of political philosophy. Thus, "…all of the phenomena studied in this book belong to the world of people who neither write nor read many books—often because they are illiterate—, who are rarely known by name to anybody except their friends, and then often only by nickname, who are normally inarticulate, and rarely understood even when they express themselves.

[13] "Copia autorizada de las diligencias de identificación de las mojoneras reconocidas por el Ing. E. Hijar y Haro en la colonia de La Ascensión, 1893."

They are *pre-political* people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world." The question of "the political" within the context of peasant rebellions is credited to Hobsbawm and an idea that will be taken to task by Guha and the Subaltern Studies Collective.

Guha, by contrast, recognized the subject as modern and refused to describe the consciousness of the peasant as anything comparable to "pre-political." Guha "insisted that instead of being an anachronism in a modernizing colonial world, the peasant was a real contemporary of colonialism, a fundamental part of the modernity that colonial rule bought to India. Theirs was not a 'backward' consciousness—a mentality left over from the past, a consciousness baffled by modern political and economic institutions and yet resistant to them. Peasant's readings of the relation of power that they confronted in the world…were by no means unrealistic or backward looking" (Chakrabarty 2000:12-13). In this particular case, the idea that state actors and historians of Mexico interpret this particular revolt as "pre-political" seems paradoxical at best, but surely contradictory in its application of this particular western theory.

Given the fact that the colonists of La Ascensión—along with the Mexican-origin populations in the late nineteenth century—were imagined as "agents of modernity" who would bring contemporary technologies from the US and repatriate them to Mexico, this example is surely not a case of "pre-political," even following the "standards" of this line of western argumentation. The colonists brought to Mexico during the nineteenth century, including this particular case, were the actual "agents of modernization" who react with "elementary aspects" of insurgency as a way to address and rectify grievances that have at their roots a complicated past of domination and resistance. The repatriation of Mexicans from the mid to late nineteenth century was a policy that not only embraced nationalist rhetoric to entice the return of its lost populations, but their migration itself was justified under the sign of modernity.

The people of La Ascension and the revolt that surfaced in early 1892, therefore, were the culmination of various grievances that are addressed with the public lynching of Ancheta: the face and actual representation of state power. Ancheta, the person, was also a man of "bad antecedents," as one contemporary noted; and this too became part and parcel of the many grievances that were manifested in his public lynching. In effect, that he wanted to be in power "by force." Theirs was a conscious and calculated reaction to the repeated, not to mention un-addressed, grievances that pepper the archival record—both literally and metaphorically. The fact that Porfirian authorities would later enter this town to rectify land claims in the months following this revolt raises a series of questions, however. How did the Ascensionenses interpret this response from the government? Did this latest

"rebellion" reveal for them that violence works? Or, that the one way to get your grievances heard is to rebel?

To summarize, this essay examined the revolt of 1892 that occurred in La Ascensión after the contentious election of the Municipal President, Rafael Ancheta. Employing heretofore unexamined archives, I argued that past historiographical interpretations that employed the Hobsbawm analysis are not only inadequate but contradictory for examining this particular case of repatriate colonization. The colonists of La Ascensión were imagined by the states as the very embodiment of "modernity" and as the bodies that would repatriate the skills and techniques learned during their tenure in the US. Even so, this rebellion has been described as an example of a "pre-modern" and "pre-political" phenomenon. Examining local archives reveals that past grievances and accusations of land fraud ultimately culminated in the rebellion of 1892. Thus, following on the words of the noted historian Guha, peasants "tried first to obtain justice from the authorities by deputation, petition, and peaceful demonstration and took up arms only as a last resort when all other means had failed" (Guha 1983:9). When the state failed to correct past grievances, these objections ultimately contributed to the conditions that gave rise to the revolt in early 1892.

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