“Fear of Invasion” Propaganda Harkens Back to WWII on the US/Mexico Border

Border issues are always with us. At best, they can be complicated. At worst, they are violent and deadly. Growing up in El Paso, Texas, SAR’s 2016–2017 Mellon fellow, David Romo, learned US/Mexico border issues well. His grandparents immigrated to the US from Juárez during the Mexican Revolution and so began his deep interest in the history of the region and the propaganda that would permeate both countries.

Romo’s research explores the role of Allied and Axis propaganda and intelligence in shaping the US/Mexico border between 1933 and 1945. In that period, the border still played a central role as a plotting ground for Mexican opposition groups. But unlike during the Mexican Revolution, when most of the revolutionaries were to the left of the Mexican government, fascist ideologies became predominant among the underground organization trying to undermine the leftist government of Mexico. It is this hidden war and the propaganda that inflamed it that Romo studies.

During his residency, Romo worked on his new book, Mexican Nazis & Global Pachucos: Propaganda, Intelligence and the Production of Border Invasion Anxiety During World War II. He utilizes a global micro-historical method that looks at a geographical slice of the world. Starting with the El Paso/Mexico border, Romo sifts out the connections between the local and the transnational. How could Nazis or fascists have had such an effect on the border at that time? And how does one discern the true level of threat vs. the propaganda aimed at fulfilling a political agenda?

During and after the Mexican Revolution, the global manifestations of communism and fascism were firmly in place. The Sinarquistas, the Mexican fascist movement, was founded in 1937 by a group of Mexican Catholics in collaboration with an alleged German intelligence agent in Guanajuato. About 50,000 strong, they were against communism, liberalism, and the United States, and supported Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler. Sinarquistas sought a return to Catholicism and were fighting for powers of the Church that were diminished during the revolution.

Romo says it was all about the perception that Mexican Nazis were recruiting Mexican American youth to serve as threats to the US and how that narrative resulted in anxiety. The propaganda surrounding this new threat was that Axis agents, Mexican Nazis with connections to Germany, were undermining the American war effort through the Mexican American Pachucos or Zoot Suiters. These youth, with their own blended lexicon, music, and flamboyant way of dress, originated in El Paso, spread to Europe, and became symbols of disloyalty. The fear and anxiety of the outside coming in and undermining national unity is how propaganda works. Totalitarian regimes, but also the so-called anti-totalitarian United States, are still using “fear of invasion” propaganda, but in varying contexts. Romo says that propaganda is not always about morality; it is always about the most effective way to mobilize the masses for your own political agenda. According to Romo, to create effective propaganda against an actual or contrived enemy, the recipe calls for only one to three emotionally charged words. Widely distributed and repeated to the masses until persuasion is achieved, the message then becomes truth.

How can all of this make sense today? Romo says that the faces of brutality have always been with us. Immigration conflicts are based on fear of the “other;” the unclean, the different, and the unfit. “Wounds must be reopened in order to heal them. My intention with my book is to clear a space in the fog, to see elements and the unperceived intention with my book is to clear a space in the fog, to see elements and the unperceived...
While at Chavín, Kolar observed similar wind patterns in both daily and seasonal cycles. Her study assesses how spaces transform sound. Kolar says, “We have multiple ways to measure that using scientific tools, but we also have multiple ways of discerning and experiencing sounds, contextually and socially. In order to study sound in context, especially archaeologically, we must look not only at the geographical features that make sound, but at the objects of sound production and the spaces in which they were produced and used, along with the possible relationships of people with those sounds.”

For example, Kolar continues, “We cannot fully comprehend the meaning or purpose of sounds created by a pututu 3,000 years ago in Chavín: we can only replicate them using reproductions and looking at the objects, spaces, and the psychology and physiology of sound reception in the body and human mind.” Sounds and feelings of sounds and awareness of the sounds are different in contextual ways. Do sounds shift due to feelings and attention to context? She posits that sound is a social tool throughout time that helps us navigate our environments and competing societies, which is what makes these studies at Chavín and other archaico-acoustic sites so important.

Evolution and Asperger Syndrome

SAR Senior Scholar Dean Falk is known for her research on the evolution of the human brain. Her work has ranged from the study of Albert Einstein’s cerebral cortex to an assessment of the brain of the diminutive hominid Homo floresiensis (a.k.a. “Hobbit”), the extinct species whose remains were first discovered on the island of Flores in Indonesia in 2003.

In a forthcoming book, Genes, Genes, and the Evolution of Asperger Syndrome (University of New Mexico Press, spring 2018), Falk takes on a radically different project by studying the emergence and spread of a form of high-functioning autism known as Asperger syndrome (AS). Co-authored with her 26-year-old granddaughter, Eve Penelope Schofield, the book suggests that many characteristics associated with AS are natural spinoffs of advanced cognition in humans. They are at the high end of the natural range of variation for certain abilities. Falk frames the discussion of autism within a wider “evo-devo” (evolutionary developmental biology) framework that focuses on the role of infants, genes, and environment, played during the evolution of the human brain. The book also provides readers with information from the literature about the neurological, genetic, and cognitive underpinnings of autistic individuals at the high-functioning end of the spectrum.

Aspies tend to be very good at things technological, as evidenced by the high number of them in Silicon Valley, for example. The book builds a compelling case that people with AS and other forms of high-functioning autism are endowed with advanced cognitive abilities (e.g., an interest in analytical/technological thinking) that were (and are) pivotal for making us human and that the prevalence of these kinds of traits is likely to increase as technological development accelerates in societies across the world.

In addition to Falk’s research and evolutionary theory, the book also contains personal perspectives from her co-author Eve Schofield, who was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome as a child. Schofield provides a first-hand account of what it is like to grow up as an Aspie. She offers vivid descriptions of intense sensory experiences, documents episodes of bullying in school, and offers suggestions for how parents of autistic children can help them achieve happy lives.

Dean Falk is the Hale G. Smith Professor of Anthropology at Florida State University and a senior scholar at SAR.

Deciphering Osama bin Laden’s Tape Collection

Who was Osama bin Laden before he became the central figure in the anti-American jihad? How did he figure in the emergence of Al Qaeda, which until the rise of ISIS was viewed by many as the world’s preeminent terrorist network?

These questions were addressed on January 26, 2017, in an SAR membership lecture presented by Flagg Miller, professor of religious studies at the University of California, Davis. Miller’s talk was part of SAR’s 2016–2017 lecture series “Crossing Global Frontiers.”

The raw material for Miller’s research was a collection of 1,500 cassette tapes that bin Laden left behind when forced to abandon his residence in Kandahar, Afghanistan, after 9/11. The results of Miller’s painstaking study of the tapes have been published in The Audacity of Xeric: What the Bin Laden Tapes Revealed about Al Qua’ida (Oxford, 2015).

The bin Laden tapes were acquired by CNN shortly after American military forces pushed the Taliban out of Afghanistan’s major cities. Agencies of the US government expressed no interest in the recordings, and eventually they fell into the hands of David Edwards, an anthropologist at Williams College and a 1999 alumnus of SAR’s resident scholar program, who brought them to Massachusetts for safekeeping. They were subsequently transferred to the archives of Yale University.

Flagg Miller, whose previous work had focused on the oral traditions of Arabic-speaking Yemenis, set out to make sense of the more than two thousand hours of conversations, poetry, religious debate, and speeches contained in this vast collection. Bin Laden’s primary goal, once the Soviet forces in Afghanistan had been defeated, was to overthrow the governments of Muslim states that, in his opinion, had become hopelessly corrupted. He preached an acerbic, Saudi-influenced version of Islam admired by many Sunni Muslims. In his book, Miller writes that “Bin Laden’s speeches made special mention of the dangers of importing American apples, Pepsi products, and Tabasco sauce, each of which contributed to Muslim subordination....”

Bin Laden was a prominent figure thanks to his role as a fighter with the Afghan mujahideen, but his fortunes took a sharp downturn in the mid-1990s after his Saudi citizenship was revoked and he lost most of his personal fortune through failed investments. Stateless and broke, he rebuilt his personal reputation by persuading CNN and other news outlets that he was the face of militant Islam. This, in turn, attracted sufficient financial support that his reputation as a leader continued to grow through 2001 and beyond. Although bin Laden’s story continued on page 3
People Who Look Like Me: A Native Artist Paints Her World

It all started with Beavis and Butthead. Luanne Redeye says, “I was in second or third grade and I knew I wasn’t supposed to watch MTV, but somehow I caught a glimpse of that cartoon. That’s when my interest in art, in portraiture in particular, started. I used to be able to see something, like a cartoon, and draw it from memory. Now not so much.”

Now Redeye, a painter, beadworker, multimedia artist, and photographer, works more from life and from photos than from memory, but it’s often memories that spark her inspiration. She grew up on the Allegany Indian Reservation in western New York and is an enrolled member of the Seneca Nation of Indians and Hawk Clan. In her artwork, she captures the reality of contemporary Native life, rather than perpetuating static, romanticized interpretations. Says Redeye, “I depict my Native culture and the relationship between perception and experience through genre scenes and portraits of people from my home reservation in New York. The images I choose to paint often have a strong personal and emotional component because of the relationship I have to the subject.”

During her time at SAR, Redeye worked on a series of five paintings and corresponding beadwork frames. While the paintings represent family members, the larger theme of the work explores alcoholism, domestic violence, abuse, and mental illness, as well as good things like caring, protecting, and teaching—themes that have affected not only Redeye and her family, but also each generation of Native americans since the start of colonialism.

“I intentionally leave out ‘Indian’ signifiers. There’s no visual cue for the viewers to categorize the people in the paintings. This forces the viewer to search further for the painting’s meaning to ask ‘why this image, why this person or these people?’”

In her artist statement, she explains that her intention is, “not to prove authenticity but to disprove what we think are authentic. The works are visual narratives of the people’s histories, capturing what it means to be Indian today.” She refers back to Beavis and Butthead, “I saw people like that on TV, but I didn’t see people that looked like me. I wanted to make my community and my family seem as seen as they are rather than as pop culture stereotypes.”

Redeye is the mother of a one-year-old boy named Eliot. She says that he has made her aware of how important it is to him that she express the complexity and difficulty of her own childhood through her art. She deals with the alcoholism and abuse in her family “by getting it out,” putting it on canvas, in photographs, and in multimedia work. For example, in her piece When the Krauze Dam Happened “Now Who’s Going to Protect You?”, she incorporated porcupine quills, which look ominously sticking out the piece. However, Redeye says her intention was to show that it is possible to contain things that are harmful without hurling them toward others as porcupines do.

Redeye acknowledges that art is important to her because she is by nature a quiet person who expresses herself better through art than through words. When asked if she believes that art is an important part of culture, she takes a long pause and gazes out the window at the trees just beginning to bud on the SAR campus, then says, “I don’t care if it’s important or not. I just have to do it.”

Shunning Suffering Mothers in Niger

When Alison (Ali) Heller arrived upon cultural anthropology at the University of Arizona, Tucson after “a ton of electives,” her world view changed radically. “The familiar became strange and the strange became familiar,” she says, “because cultural anthropology shakes the way you see the world.”

After graduation, Heller’s quest for field experience led her first to the Peace Corps in Togo from 2006–2009, and then to sign on as a researcher on a project sponsored by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for fieldwork in Niger. She then moved on to a larger project, which she says “looked like me. I wanted to make my community and my family seem as seen as they are rather than as pop culture stereotypes.”

In February 2017, SAR’s field trip program wandered even further off the beaten path than usual with a trip to the Yucatán Peninsula to follow the footsteps of early SAR archaeologists such as Sylvanus Morley. The group of fourteen SAR members was led by renowned Maya archaeologist and former SAR fellow Dr. William Saturno. Along with Michael Brown, president of SAR, they visited the ruins of Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, and Edzna, Izamal, and Dzibilchaltun. Join us on upcoming trips fieldtrips.sarweb.org.

Deciphering Osama bin Laden’s Tape Collection

Osama bin Laden unquestionably played a role in planning and implementing the 9/11 attacks, and a bin Laden that is obsessive in his focus on Afghanistan and Al Qaeda blundered the US to the broader political forces at work in the Arab world.

In a conversation with SAR president Michael Brown, Heller described the challenge of working with such a large amount of audio. This was a long project that took me over ten years of research. For a number of years before bin Laden was killed, I saw little evidence of what most of the intelligence community and federal prosecutors said was there: a history of an organization led by bin Laden called Al Qaeda whose primary objective was to target the United States.” From his assessment of the tapes, Heller believes that bin Laden launched a process of myth-making that appealed to Western news sources. Al Qaeda is “less single}

organization, network, or set of affiliations united by a common ideology than it is a tactic for winning battles within Muslim majority societies.”

Bin Laden himself speaks on only a handful of the tapes, a few of which contain conversations involving multiple individuals whom Miller managed to identify through careful detective work. One important recording was made in a room in which a cook was preparing a meal. People came and left, and there was background whispering and casual chatter. “I spent months working on that tape,” Miller said. “This attention to sound is consistent with one of Miller’s key goals: to show how oral performance, including the poetry of deleted from published transcripts of Osama bin Laden’s pronouncements, offers a path to understanding the internal dynamics and diverse perspectives of Islamic militants.

ALISON HELLER, 2016–2017 SAR CAMPBELL FELLOW, WITH WOMEN AT HER RESEARCH SITE IN NIAMEY, NIGER.

SAR, Heller says, has given her the time to work on her book, which she hopes will ultimately aid in improving lives for the women who suffer from obstetric fistula. “The state for the NGOs,” she asserts, adding that global power has “striped power” from African states. To receive help from such organizations as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund “… the states had to comply, to privatize according to the dictates of neo-liberalism. The states can’t afford to look after their people,” she says, “They want an observation that might surprise those who support globalization.”

“The state works for the NGOs,” she adds, “They want the states to have the NGOs as their partners.”

Heller’s work outlines the main points about the condition, its causes, and its sometimes needlessly outsized impact on the women it affects.

Much of the problem stems from a shifting of responsibility from international and national governments and NGOs to women’s right to health; the task of improving the lives of women who suffer obstetric fistula. “Sometimes I don’t leave my house for a week. I have never had an opportunity like this, to just write. I can’t imagine this experience. I thank SAR for this truly incredible experience,” she smiles, “I am supported without expectations, supported and trusted to do this the best way in an atmosphere of restorative beauty and calm.”
Pseudo-ceremonial pots were created by Zuni Pueblo potters in the early twentieth century to cater to the desires of museum collectors and tourists who wanted pottery that had cultural significance and was historic. These Zuni pots were not used for special ceremonies nor were they old, but they were made to look that way. Potters created works based on older designs and often gave them a patina using paint pitch to create the illusion of age and use. About fifty of these pots ended up in the collection at the Indian Arts Research Center (IARC) at the School for Advanced Research (SAR).

In 2008, the IARC and the A:wan Museum at Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico, embarked on a collaborative partnership to set the record straight about Zuni items in SAR's vaults. The program had three major components: (1) systematically review the entire Zuni collection held at SAR (over 1000 items) to correct errors and add additional information; (2) establish guidelines regarding access for research, publication, storage, and handling; and (3) provide the School's digital catalog records of items to Zuni. Collection reviews are a critical component of a process to determine appropriate stewardship of collections, including potential repatriation of sacred objects to the tribes who created them and consider them cultural patrimony. In an ironic twist, the reviewers in this case learned that, for the most part, the opposite was true. Because most of these pots were neither sacred nor ceremonial, they did not need to be returned.

Pseudo-ceremonial pottery played off ideas of primitivism by catering to the dominant white culture's assumptions of how ceremonial pottery should appear. This resulted in pots that were often extremely fanciful and sometimes bizarre in appearance. They had impractical forms and random attachments or holes in the vessels. The strange figures that often appeared on pseudo-ceremonial pottery were atypical of traditional Zuni forms. There is still ongoing debate as to how these forms were commissioned by white traders for sale to museums and collectors.

With the collection review with Zuni Pueblo completed, IARC staff is now working on modifying existing documentation of the entire Zuni collection with new information provided by the reviewers. The collection review initiative continues with representatives from Acoma Pueblo to learn about the vast collection of Acoma ceramics and other artwork in the IARC vaults.

In the 1770s in northern New Mexico, one of the most prized wedding presents a couple could receive was the gift of another human being; in particular a Native American child, captured in war, then sold as a slave. The captives, both adults and children, were converted to Catholicism, learned Spanish, and were said to have been absorbed into non-Native culture. They were, and still are, known as Genízaro, when they are known at all. Though they've maintained their cultural identity, they are probably the least well known of all of New Mexico's cultures. Finally, that is changing.

Gregorio Gonzales, SAR’s 2016–2017 Katrin H. Lamon Fellow, himself a Genízaro, has spent his fellowship researching and writing his PhD dissertation, which he recently successfully defended at the University of Texas at Austin. His project examines the politics of recognition, cultural representation, and subject formation in northern New Mexico and the US Southwest Borderlands through an anthropological study of Genízaro identity in the Rio Chama and Taos valleys, where he is from.

In October 2016, Gonzales presented a colloquium at SAR titled Sí Eres Genízaro: Recognition, Belonging, and Genízaro Indigeneity in Northern New Mexico where he related particular histories and experiences of Genízaro social life within the Pueblo de Abiquiú and Ranchos de Taos. A video of his presentation is available on the SAR website at gonzales.sarweb.org.