theories and methodologies

Unsettlers and Speculators

KIRSTEN SILVA GRUESZ

CONSIDERING THAT IT WAS SUMMERTIME, THE WEATHER IN NEW ENGLAND WAS PUZZLINGLY COLD. NONETHELESS, THE MEN IN THE SEA-beaten wooden ship offered thanks, in the Protestant fashion, for the bounty of fresh provisions: oysters and seals; vast herds of deer, tule elk, and pronghorn. Mutual curiosity informed their encounters with the people they met. The English admired their extraordinary basketwork, their shell ornaments, their headpieces of brilliant black condor feathers.

If the bio- and ethnoscapes of this New England sketch seem a little off, it is because I have moved its longitudal coordinates west by fifty degrees and spun the time setting of an originary North American encounter back by several decades. The English sailors and supplicants were not Puritan separatists but the remainder of Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation expedition, which made landfall along the Pacific coast—by most estimates, in northern California—in 1579. The story of their several weeks' stay there is speculative in many senses. The fortuitously named *Golden Hind* returned loaded with treasure; the marker that Drake supposedly placed near his landfall buttressed unfulfilled English territorial claims for many years after; and in our own day historians, anthropologists, and geographers both trained and untrained continue to debate the precise location of Nova Albion. This is the very stuff of which counterfactual histories and speculative historical fictions are made: what if other Englishmen had later returned with settlers and supplies? If the English colonial project along the North American Pacific had rooted itself earlier, and farther south than Vancouver, would its later pattern of settlement have pulsed west to east across the continent instead of east to west?

Raúl Coronado's *A World Not to Come: A History of Latino Writing and Print Culture* does not indulge in these kinds of counterfactuals, but it is animated by a related belief in the cleansing power of speculative thinking. Coronado calls his readers to let go of the present-day notion of Texas as "some behemoth of nationalist

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independent feeling" and return imaginatively to the moment when it was "a desolate, emerging, interstitial colony" (*World* 20). This is an effort not so much to re-create what it felt like to live in such a place as to divorce the signifier Texas/*Tejas* from its geotemporal coordinates, as I tried to do playfully with New England. Coronado has written a gripping account of insurgent political thought as developed by communities of Spanish speakers centered in but not limited to the shifting boundaries of Texas before and after its incorporation into the United States: "a history of false starts, of dreams that failed to cohere" (394). These people formed among themselves imagined communities that "did not necessarily lead to nationalism"; the hand-copied declarations, printed broadsides, and newspaper editorials they authored and embraced reflect—he argues—"conceptions of rights and subjectivity that do not genuflect to our now dominant account of possessive individualism." His protagonists are text makers and text receivers, hearers as well as readers, who responded to the collapse of monarchism and what he calls the "disenchantment of the world" that followed, by developing ideas about sovereignty through a kind of historical back channel: late-medieval scholasticism. This nonsecular yet curiously modern form of reason was conveyed by and allegorically displayed in the form of the printing press. Coronado proposes "a discursive history of these texts" that "will go a long way toward offering an alternative model of modernity as it unfolded in the Americas" (8). The book identifies itself, then, as a history of ideas: more than simply recovering this early Texas, he wants to reverse its position on the periphery of United States American intellectual life—to move events that were previously footnotes into the main body of that painful text about how we became Americans.

Coronado's book appears in the midst of a renaissance of sorts in scholarship on the early Americas that, while mining mostly unrelated source materials, similarly seeks to reorient colonial centers and peripheries, to detach place-names from their mythic accretions, to forget the stories we think we know. Kathleen Donegan's *Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement*, for instance, encourages us to dwell in the precarity and unknownness of the Europeans' "seasoning time": to "try to see it as a cluster of unassimilated events rather than as an established body of forward-leaning facts" (7). Balancing the once-dominant Plymouth story with those of Roanoke, Jamestown, and Barbados, Donegan argues that the cycle of suffering and violence marks the mutual condition of indigenous and Europeans caught in "the unsettling act of colonial settlement" (2). That term, *unsettlement*, is the fulcrum of another major (and MLA-laureled) revisionist work, Anna Brickhouse's *The Unsettlement of America: Translation, Interpretation, and the Story of Don Luis de Velasco, 1560–1945*. Brickhouse, like Donegan and Coronado, emphasizes the "desolate, emerging, interstitial" quality of colonial spaces: from the place in the Chesapeake Bay that the Spanish called Ajacán, southward to *la Florida* and the Caribbean, then back again to the United States–Mexico border.

Finally, Dana Luciano and Ivy G. Wilson's edited collection *Unsettled States* showcases new scholarship on the long nineteenth century. Luciano's introduction finds a perfect metaphor for unsettlement in the New Madrid earthquakes that rocked a region just undergoing a significant shift in territorial governance, from Spanish Louisiana to American Missouri, and spawned one of the great unfulfilled revolutions of all time, Tecumseh's panindigenous insurgency. (In a suggestive overlap, the years Luciano isolates here, roughly 1811–13, mark the very moment at which, according to Coronado, the brothers José Antonio and José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara were acting as agents of the alternate modernity of popular sovereignty in Texas.) Nationalism, Luciano reminds us, nourishes

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partial histories and maps out self-interested perspectives, such that "[b]oth time and space become 'settled' . . . as new cultural histories and trajectories are developed to secure and perpetuate the settlement's geographical revisions" of what had been and continues to be Native space (9). She contrasts the critical work of unsettling against the weak inclusionary logic of multiculturalism and against overly simplistic paradigms of resistance—*resistance* being a term about which Coronado and Brickhouse are similarly skeptical. As Brickhouse defines it, "*unsettlement* signals not merely the contingency and noninevitability but the glaring incompleteness of the history of the New World as we currently know it" (2).[1] That each of these books focuses on different points in traditional Americanist period divisions—Donegan's concentrates mainly on the seventeenth century and Coronado's on the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth, whereas Brickhouse's leaps boldly from the sixteenth through the twentieth—suggests that unsettlement has not only multiple meanings but also a long reach.

A World Not to Come bears the added burden of addressing another field, one that extends beyond the humanistic disciplines: Latino studies. Although the main title orients us toward futurity, the subtitle describes the book modestly as *a* history of Latino print culture. Perhaps no other population in the United States today attracts so much speculative attention and future-driven anxiety as Latinas and Latinos: will they assimilate culturally, educationally, economically? Will their differently vexed racial codes overcome or be overcome by those of the mainstream? Will the Latino voting bloc actually move the political needle? Will the United States continue to be home to the second-largest Spanish-speaking population on the globe, or will today's bilinguals adopt English with new vigor? Such speculative betting on Latino futures—which will also occur outside the bounds of the United States nation-state, especially if Puerto Rico changes status—weighs heavily on efforts to construct a Latino past. Coronado cautiously suggests resonances between the experiences of past and present communities but resists the imposition of a genealogy that would precisely join them. *A* history of Latino writing and print culture centered on Texas, therefore one of many, would seem to be categorizable as a work of border studies. Yet the term *border studies*, invented by historians a century ago and popularized by the so-called transnational turn in American studies, may have exhausted its critical potential: Coronado rarely uses it, although his book is certainly a rebuttal to nationally oriented optics.[2]

Put differently, the reorientation of space implicit in border studies must be accompanied by the reorientation of time promoted by theorists of unsettlement. Coronado writes that the object of his analysis extends to "the space of overlap between Spanish America and the United States, to the individuals and communities of 'Latinos' that circulated in the United States and throughout the Atlantic world"—more specifically, "the geographic space that *would become* Mexico and the United States" (*World* 17). Temporality is important here: *what would become* replaces the more common formation *what is now*, as in the project Languages of What Is Now the United States, which in the early 2000s made significant inroads against the assumption of American literature's monolingualism.[3] Coronado chooses the "future-in-past tense of the auxiliary 'would' and the inchoative aspect of 'become,' rather than the past tense proper," or the fixed end point of *what is now*, because "[t]he future-in-past tense draws out, unfolds, and lengthens the process of 'becoming'" (*World* 18). Readers of this book and its contemporary kindred are directed not to always historicize but to always unknow: to dwell in Donegan's future-blind "seasoning time." Such a mandate may be expecting a lot even of enthusiastic novel readers, and it remains

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an unorthodox move for a work of history writing. It raises a question about this crop of unsettlement books, all of which came from scholars in literature departments: Will historians read them? Since *A World Not to Come* received not only a book prize from the MLA but also several awards from historical associations, it may be the bellwether of a shift in the relation between those perennially squabbling intellectual siblings, history and literature.

A turn to one of the kindred works may be helpful here. Like Coronado, Brickhouse rescues from history's footnotes a forgotten figure, the indigenous translator Paquiquineo / Don Luis de Velasco, who used his rhetorical abilities to thwart Spanish settlement designs in Virginia. Before launching into Don Luis's story, however, Brickhouse pulls another plank out from the wobbling foundations of the Pilgrim-origins myth by revisiting its famous translator, Squanto (who came after, not before, Brickhouse's "unfounding father," Don Luis [4]). Squanto, abducted from his native village of Patuxet, came to England only after spending three years in Spain, and Brickhouse proposes that thinking about him as "Hispanophone Squanto" [8] multiplies the vectors of language encounter and gets us closer to the long chains of translation and mistranslation that offered opportunities for indigenous unsettlement. She asks, "[H]ow might the historical subject who was brought to Spain but sidestepped his intended fate as a slave reorient our understanding of the history in which he appears"? (41). Because there is scant record of Squanto and his comrades in Spain, to recall him as "Hispanophone Squanto" thus "requires both the *associative* and the *imaginative* flexibilities of *intellectual* and *speculative* history, respectively" (41; emphases mine). A dialectical method is spelled out here: intellectual history exercises an associative practice; speculative history, an imaginative one. Perhaps a defining feature of unsettlement work, then, is its embrace of the necessary entwinement of these two ways of articulating the past: as a history of ideas but also as a leap of the imagination that questions what the other narrative has just built.

Brickhouse meticulously documents her sources and accumulates evidence in a way that most historians would be hard-pressed to fault. But, in telling the story of Paquiquineo / Don Luis, she also dives into speculation. When tracking the tiny thread of a reported sighting of the translator twenty years after he led the Spaniards to their deaths, for instance, she suggests he might have inspired or led a series of violent Indian strikes against Spanish settlements across Florida. Most historians would find insufficient evidence here to make a case, yet the speculation itself provokes a defamiliarization, an unknowing. Those acts of violence had been seen as isolated events without a purpose or a leader: revolts rather than revolutions. But what if Don Luis was, like Tecumseh, a master of communication circuits that were deliberately kept from European eyes and that remain so?

It is easy to draw a bright line between the genres of narrative history and historical fiction: narrative history is written by experts who can testify about facts; historical fiction is written by people who exercise artistic liberty—whether in the Broadway musical *Hamilton* or in the recent crop of Puritan gothic films. The distinction between writers of speculative history and of speculative fiction, however, is more nebulous. The story of Don Luis, like the story of the Gutiérrez de Lara brothers, feels like it could be an episode in one of the counterhistorical fictions that are so common to New World novelists like Alejo Carpentier or Maryse Condé. Perhaps this is why unsettlement studies seem to emanate mostly from literature departments, even as their method seems far removed from what used to be called literary criticism.

Coronado's book has excited some controversy among historians yet seems to be legible to them as a work of history. In

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a roundtable organized by the Society of United States Intellectual Historians and featuring distinguished scholars on both sides of the United States–Latin American aisle, Coronado explained that he wanted to reconstruct "the world of ideas" in early Spanish-speaking Texas "because these communities were among the first to attempt to understand their world by drawing from both Hispanic-Catholic and Anglo-Protestant epistemologies. . . . This is a 'Latino' history not in the identitarian sense—no one identified as such during the nineteenth century—but in the epistemic sense" ("Author's Response"). Again, he follows Native scholarship in underscoring the legitimacy of multiple ways of knowing. Intellectual history is indeed an associational practice, constellating individual utterances and widely shared discourses: if those assemblages are thick enough, they qualify as evidence to historians. But what of Brickhouse's other requirement, the imaginative flexibility that goes by the name of speculative history? For all the overtones of Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin summoned by the phrase "a world not to come," Coronado's book ultimately weighs in more heavily on the intellectual-history side, following the precise verbal inflection of "what would become," than on the speculative side. In its moving final pages, however, Coronado again invokes the transtemporal imagination: "Histories can enrich our own imaginaries by reintroducing concepts that had been discarded or, perhaps more accurately, existed only liminally" (*World* 395). One wonders how far into the speculation zone historians are willing to follow. This unsettled ground may simply be one that we literary people are better at describing.

A mainstream history book whose title bears an uncanny resemblance to Coronado's may help answer this question. In January 2014, as Coronado was accepting his prize at the MLA convention, Felipe Fernández-Armesto's *Our America: A Hispanic History of the United States* was released, to a level of positive media attention that rarely accompanies even crossover scholarship in literature. Fernández-Armesto's subtitle shares the same modest article, claiming to be *a* but not *the* history of the group fuzzily labeled as Hispanic or Latino, as well as a similar mandate to reorient conventional geographies: it adopts "a point of view of a history of the United States that starts in the south and is slanted towards a Hispanic perspective" (23). Fernández-Armesto begins, with evident relish, on such a defamiliarizing note, recounting how he would trick job candidates into misnaming the first permanent settlement in what is now the territory of the United States. None guess his answer: Ponce, Puerto Rico. He proposes "a rewriting of the country's past" from that point of origin (5). So far, he is writing in the vein of the critical unsettlers. But when it comes to the revolutionary period that is so crucial for Coronado's story, Fernández-Armesto perceives none of the same locally sourced ideas or political energies. Dismissing republicanism in the Americas as a weaker movement than in Spain, he mentions not a word about the embrace of independence among the people of San Antonio de Béxar, referring only to a "filibuster army" that "took advantage of the chaos of the wars in which Spain was embroiled to attack San Antonio" a year earlier (134). More than half of Coronado's book, in other words, takes place in the interstices of this single line in Fernández-Armesto's purportedly revisionist, south-to-north Hispanic counterhistory. The brevity of the reference can't be because the 1813 insurgency-uprising in Béxar had been completely unknown to earlier historians before: far from it, as Coronado's extensive notes document.

Our America is a wide-angle synthesis, so this lack might be forgivable, if it weren't for the persistence with which Fernández-Armesto invokes the language of alternative histories and minoritarian perspectives. The

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colonial era provides him with several speculative asides, and when he reaches the nineteenth century, he laments that the potential of an "alternative America—the creation of Spanish missionaries and colonists in what is now the United States—was already in ruins" (131).[4] In the end, however, the book disavows speculative history altogether. Taking on Samuel P. Huntington's question of what the United States would have become had it been settled by Spanish Catholics rather than English Protestants, Fernández-Armesto writes impatiently, "The question, like all counterfactual questions, is tiresome because it is hard enough to know what did happen in the past without worrying about what might have happened" (333). Despite Huntington's conclusions about the threat posed to American institutions by Latino immigration, many Latina/o scholars have found in his question a useful opening to the project of unsettling national memory. Fernández-Armesto shuts down that dialogue, asserting that the "factual basis of Huntington's question is false" because "a lot of what is now the United States was settled by French and Spanish Catholics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (333) and "some places have never lost continuity with the Spanish past" (343). His example is Santa Barbara, California—the epitome of a Spanish fantasy heritage site romanticized for the consumption of a mostly Anglo elite.

Fernández-Armesto has written, then, a traditional history of Hispanics-Latinos (he sees no meaningful distinction between the two terms), not a Latino history in Coronado's sense. While *Our America* required some recovering of things the nation has forgotten, doing the recovering without the unsettling can at times cause outright harm.[5] Which brings me to one of the most valuable gifts offered by Coronado's rich work: the four appendixes containing transcriptions and translations of some of the key archival documents he discusses, none previously published. I am particularly captivated by the most recognizably literary of these additions to the body of Latino writing: the "Remembrance of the Things That Took Place in Béxar in 1813 under the Tyrant Arredondo," an undated narrative dictated by one or more female survivors of the slaughter, capture, and communal torture of the San Antonians who supported Gutiérrez de Lara's 1813 call to independence. Coronado integrates this story into the climax of his chapter on that antimonarchical uprising, initiating what I hope will be a long thread of scholarly discussion about this virtually unknown manuscript, collected long after its composition by Hubert Howe Bancroft, a border historian. As the *testimonio* of these "citizen mothers" (427)—a term used interchangeably with "patriot women" (428)—the "Remembrance" is a complexly structured and haunting narrative about how unchecked power seeks to turn souls into nonpersons.

After a devastating loss to Spanish royalist forces at the Battle of Medina, a few hundred of these proindependence San Antonians fled in family groups east toward the Louisiana border, hoping to find refuge in the United States. They trekked two hundred miles, carrying their children and a few possessions, but were caught by the pursuing troops. Most of the men were executed; the surviving women and children remained in the hot sun for days, "until the water became stagnant with the bodies of the dead that surpassed a hundred." The rhetoric of this passage emphasizes a slippage from the human to the animal in the needless torture and intimidation tactics used on refugees who had already been captured. The tactics backfired when a "European Captain" "lost his judgment upon seeing such inhumane carnage" and killed the head of his own division (428). Strip-searched and robbed of their valuables and papers, the mostly female group was force-marched back to San Antonio. They reentered their hometown bound together at the hands with rope, like a line of convicts or slaves, recalling for us what the narrative

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itself does not, that Spanish and creole wars on Indians had involved the same iconography of captives roped together, often bound for forced labor. But the ordeal was not over: the captives were sent to a rural estate or *quinta*, where they were held as forced laborers to provision the troops, liming corn to make *nixtamal*, grinding it, and making tortillas. The guards and officers, according to the *testimonio*, expressed a sadistic enjoyment of absolute power over the women's bodies, degrading them as contaminated and worthless. Women with infants were not allowed to breastfeed them, and those with older children shooed them away to beg crumbs from the unfriendly townspeople.

The narrator catalogs these abuses with both precision and elision, evoking the enslavement story of Harriet Jacobs or the survivors' tales from Wounded Knee. As with the many other stories of suffering to which "Remembrance" might be compared, sexual violence is hinted at through the trope of the unsayable. The guards, according to the narrating woman or women, used the "crudest words and the most impure, indecent, and ugly actions, that they cause one to blush to say them, to write them, that not even the paper will permit them to be written down" (431). One sergeant named Acosta, an early template for Simon Legree, "would whip each and every one of them whenever he wanted, without more cause or motive than having a desire to do so," denigrating them as whores and calling himself "the God of the whores" (432). He and other guards attempted to dehumanize them both through violence to the body and with discursive violence, "inventing new methods of punishment in order to mortify and defame them" (431). Acosta's tactics relied on breaking down the codes of caste and gendered value that had previously governed the lives of these "patriot mothers": once, he caught them enjoying a moment of mutual consolation and laughter, and as punishment handed them sixty shirts to mend. When they asked for needles, he pulled out his penis and said, Here's your needle. Yet the act of narrating such details asserts the women's personhood in the face of efforts to destroy it.

Violation is suggested in another way: the metonymic substitution of one body part for another. Coronado comments on one such striking detail, of the women's feet and fingers being torn from the unremitting hard labor and being forced to work with the hot corn-lime mixture before it properly cooled, so that their blood would commingle with the corn (255–60). The narrator (or narrators) suggests that the skin of some of the women was delicate because they had never ground *nixtamal* or made tortillas before, meaning that some had been wealthy enough to have servants, likely indigenous or mestiza women. But clearly most of the women knew how to do those chores quite well, and they knew how to mend. Nowhere does the narrator break down the caste or social composition of the hundred captive women in the *quinta*, perhaps because they felt bound together by suffering. It is helpful to recall here Nicole Guidotti-Hernández's conclusion that masculine power structures in both the United States and Mexico "relied on the abjection of certain specter bodies" against which violence was legitimated: the bodies of women discarded or marked as illicit by sexual policing (Acosta's "whores") and the bodies of indigenous people of both genders (9). This observation does not lessen the suffering of any of the San Antonio settlers who were punished for asserting their political agency, but it reminds us of Donegan's rationale for dwelling on the miseries of colonial settlement, including those of Europeans: "because doing so challenges us to hold suffering and violence in our minds at the same time" (204). "Remembrance" should take its place among other important American narratives of the corrosive effects of structural violence accompanied by impunity.

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After twenty days for some of the prisoners, fifty-four days for others, they were allowed to leave the *quinta*. But they came home to discover themselves literally unsettled, pushed out of their old homes: "[A]fter they were freed, no one [in San Antonio] would acknowledge them, even here in the heart of their own *Patria*" (Coronado, *World* 432). The pathos of this rejection, the injury of their disavowed personhood, is directed not only at their fellow Texans but also toward a different reading audience, whose sympathy it demands. While the term *patria*, homeland, refers here to Béxar, elsewhere in this document it addresses fellow citizens of Mexico, where the document ended up.[6] What if, instead, the citizen-mothers had retraced their steps and, this time, reached their destination of Louisiana? What place might "Remembrance" have found then in our national memory of suffering, loss, and ultimately survival?

About sixty miles south of San Antonio, along the centuries-old route to Monterrey, Mexico, sits the South Texas Detention Center, one of eight in that state contracted by the federal Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agency. A privately run prison for violators of immigration laws, it contains bed space for just under 1,500 men—roughly the number of the insurgent army of the forgotten 1813 revolution—and one-third again as many women. The occupants are mostly Central American and Mexican, caught on their way to what they hoped would be refuge in the United States. Many of the women await reunion with their children, who remain at home, fled with them and were separated, or already live on the United States side of the border. Most arrive having already suffered unspeakable violence along the migrant trail. Spatially occluded from public view, these detention centers represent an arrested temporality as well. While individual cases are reviewed, the telos of each person's story is unknown: they are noncitizens, temporary residents—and potential Latinos—until they become, in most cases, deportees. Their still-unfolding stories echo across this Texas place, suturing past and future in a way that should profoundly unsettle us.

Notes

1. Luciano proposes unsettlement as a pliable critical method that "operates in a number of contexts, including critical multiculturalism, postcolonial and indigenous studies, spectral historiography, narratology, and queer, trauma, and affect theory" (8). Brickhouse, while similarly drawn to the multiple connotations of the term, uses it more concretely to mean an action "undertaken by an indigenous subject [that] involves the concrete attempt to annihilate or otherwise put an end to a European colony," as in the story of Don Luis's betrayal of Spanish designs through deliberate mistranslation (2).

2. Coronado writes, for example, that "the failure of Texas to sustain its independence and, consequently, its annexation to the United States is why and where historians of Spanish America stop and pass on the baton to historians of the United States, leaving the history of these peoples in limbo, as if their lived experiences could easily be demarcated by the making and breaking of the borders of nation-states" ("Author's Response").

3. Known by the acronym LOWINUS and sponsored by Werner Sollors and Marc Shell at Harvard's Longfellow Institute, the project produced a widely read anthology and an essay collection, and it has republished various translated editions of non-English works. It is no longer active. The MLA forum Literatures of the United States in Languages Other Than English grew out of the loose affiliation brought into being by LOWINUS, but it normalized the antiteleology of "what is now the United States."

4. Fernández-Armesto cites his mixed Spanish-British heritage as part of his qualification to write the book, and the Hispanic perspective he offers reflects that background. For instance, the section about early Texas is replete with sentences whose subject is the Spanish authorities, positioning them as the only historical actors who can convey the Latino perspective. Likewise, indigenous people are represented as victims with no agency: "the indios seemed to respond to every kind of treatment, from brutal to benign, in the same ways: they died and they bred less" (54). His perspective on the mission system tends toward the apologetic: "Mission life was, in its way, as hard for the friars as for the indios" (117). The word "squaw" even makes a nonironic appearance (50).

5. On the noncoincidence of recovery work with minoritarian histories, see Lazo; Streeby.

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6. The document ends by noting that the real and personal property of the families was never returned to them: it may have been used as legal testimony. Because it compares the Bejareños to other local supporters of Mexican independence movements and calls the women citizens, it is clearly addressed to an audience in Mexico.

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