

AMY ANDREA MARTINEZ – Santa Bruta, home of *el indio muerto*

Since 2009 I have been conducting field research on how the carceral apparatuses of settler colonialism work to structurally and ontologically subordinate Mexican/Chicano self- and/or state identified gang members from the Eastside of Santa Barbara, California. These members call Santa Barbara “Santa Bruta,” where *bruta* means translated holy dumb, raw, crude, or beast.

I highlight how the city’s use of gang suppression tactics (including hyperpolicing, hypersurveillance, and the threat of incarceration and deportation) and its desire to preserve and project its romanticized colonial past allows for what I call a “colonial-carceral governance” that primarily targets Mexican/Chicano boys and men. I document the resilience of these young people through various forms of cultural production, such as tattoos, Chicano gangsta rap, and BMX riding. This study emphasizes how U.S. settler colonialism continues to shape the necropolitical terrains Mexican/Chicano young people in suburban settings traverse.

I have interviewed over thirty Eastside *bruteros* and closely followed the lives of ten participants for some eleven years. Below, I provide photos that give a sense of “La Bruta” without revealing participant identities.



Photograph Credit: Dave's Travel Corner



Photograph Credit: World Atlas

1. Santa Barbara—“*The American Riviera*” – Santa Barbara is a coastal California city located 95 miles northwest of Los Angeles. It is bound on the south by the Pacific Ocean, the north by the Los Padres National Forest, and the west by the city of Goleta, a small town with a sizeable student population due to the presence of the University of California, Santa Barbara. To the east, lies Montecito, an affluent community of million-dollar estates and celebrity residents. Its location along a picturesque strip of California coastline has established Santa Barbara as a prime tourist destination.



Photographer: Fritz Olenberger

2. Santa Barbara *Fiesta* – Amidst Santa Barbara’s overwhelmingly white and affluent community is an often-overlooked population of Mexicans, a population that is counted as “present” only during *Fiestas*, an annual eight-day festival “celebration” of American Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and early settlers that are the core makeup of the cultural heritage of the city.



(Photograph taken by Paul Wellman)

3. “Fuck *Fiestas*!” – Typically, two weeks before the *Fiestas* “celebration,” Mexican/Chicano boys and men who have been identified as gang affiliated are locked up to not “scare off” (white)

tourists for the economic benefit of the city. Thus, many Mexican/Chicano boys and men avoid attending *Fiestas* and resent the celebration as it exacerbates their vulnerability to policing and incarceration.



(Photograph taken by Amy A. Martinez)

4. “BRUTA” – Despite the criminalization of their aesthetics (clothing style and tattooing), many Mexican/Chicano gang members sport some iteration of “Santa Bruta” or “Brutero” inked onto their bodies. These tattooing practices among Mexican/Chicano gang members serve as a form of self-preserving resistance against a colonial gaze that attempts to deny their right to produce self-dignifying counter-narratives of their personhood.



5. “In the field” –I do not shy away from relying on my positionality as a working-class and systems-impacted Xicana. I employ a politics of *cariño* (care) to build trust and rapport with the homeboys of the Eastside—many of whom, over the years, have become more like family to me rather than simply “research participants.” I pride myself in the love and trust I have earned in

the “hood” from both young gangsters and OGs. A lot of the homies affectionately refer to me as their “Professor Homegirl.”