



GILBERTO ROSAS

AND MIREYA LOZA,

EDITORS

THE
BORDER
ADDER

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AND MIREYA LOZA, EDITORS

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Bringing *The Border Reader* to fruition has been a herculean task. It's been difficult to grapple with selecting these pieces as so much scholarship is worthy of being reproduced in this reader. And new scholarship is transforming this area every day.

The project has taken years and years, and years. And while such a project demands multiple volumes, our goal was to provide a preliminary cross-section of key works. Limitations in terms of space and breadth made this process much more challenging, as well as navigating the world of copyright and reproduction. While we would have liked to cover all the currents in Border Studies, the scope and scale of this project limited those possibilities.

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Introduction:

On Theories from the Ends

GILBERTO ROSAS AND MIREYA LOZA

As Mercedes, BMWs, and other luxury vehicles zoom over the Rio Grande through special lanes, Pintos, Chevys, and pick-ups sit on the bridge. They wait their turn to cross, spewing brown toxins into the air. Dogs press their snouts into wheel wells, onto tires, into trunks. They seek people, drugs, or other contraband. Helicopters buzz the desert landscape from above. Infrared sensors document defiant life below.¹ Border guards move on foot, bikes, horses, and all-terrain vehicles; and the walls, fences, and infrared sensors testify to the effectiveness of crossings of all sorts. Be they from Mexico, Central America, Haiti, Cuba, China, or elsewhere across the globe, would-be border crossers abandon their ways of life and confront border guards, police, the National Guard, and their complex mirroring in vigilantes, *polleros* or human smugglers.² The border increasingly has become a site of militarized surveillance and border enforcement with deadly repercussions, as policy makers turned their attention toward racialized anxieties about irregular border crossers.³ Now the border stages the latest wave of migrants: Central Americans, Africans, and Middle Easterners, sometimes with their families, and their efforts to be heard. They seek asylum.

Anti-border or post-citizenship formations animate the US-Mexico border region. They inspire alternative representations in art and popular music. They infuse alternative kin relations, geographies, desires, and economies. These dynamics render the US-Mexico border as material and imaginary. It is both utopic and dystopic. It is militarized and peaceful; organized and chaotic; masculine and feminine; it is straightening and queering; it is sometimes white, sometimes brown, and always Other; it is where untold wealth and regimes of impoverishment brutally collide. As with all borders, the international boundary between the United States and Mexico troubles distinctions between strangers and enemies, between the criminal and the law-abiding, between immigrant and citizen.

The US-Mexico border specifically, and borders generally, have grown in importance as border controls and undocumented border crossings have intensified across the globe. Be it the boundaries between the United States and Mexico, Israel and Palestine, or Guatemala and Mexico; the channels between Europe and Africa; or the genocidal partitioning of India, territorial divisions incite regimes of differentiation, typically as racialization. Such divisions also incite dreams of post- or non-bordered worlds. Indigenous communities whose sovereign assertions point to a different order, the alien-nated and their trans-border kin networks, and other critical communities in border regions bear memories of different borders, moments when the boundaries between countries were largely immaterial or experienced on radically different terms.

The Border Reader curates some of the foundational scholarship on the region, its daily life, and its tensions. From linguistic studies of the criminal argot of smugglers, to insistences on the region's normalcy, to smugg confirmations of US superiority, to romanticized folklores of resistance in *corridos* and related forms, to studies on health and immigration policy, questions about who, what, and which language—English, Spanish, Yoeme, or even Q'anjob'al—represent the border remain pertinent. Perhaps, what has sparked the most scholarship is the foundational intervention of Chicana scribe Gloria Anzaldúa's 1987 text *Borderlands: La New Mestiza* and its literary interpretation of the border as a larger metaphor. As Anzaldúa's conception of the border gained popularity, the North American Free Trade Agreement and the growing militarization of the border acted as catalysts for material interpretations and stringent debates.⁴ The 1990s also gave rise to a contemporary generation of families caught in a moment of securitized borders and migrations, with fewer options toward documentation or related kinds of legal footing in the United States.

The empirical bent of earlier border studies should be contrasted with the theoretical interventions of those who take the border as a site of epistemic rupture, interventions, and departures.⁵ Scholars like María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo,

Sonia Saldivar-Hull, Emma Perez, Patricia Zavella, and Alicia Schmidt Camacho show how feminist, queer, and critical race scholars, including Chicano and Latino scholars, indigenous scholars, and scholars of indigeneity, as well as those vested in questions of decoloniality have mobilized the border to press against dominant theories of societies, cultures, the state, and related questions.

The Border Reader offers a vibrant alternative canon for scholars and students in a range of fields including Anthropology, History, English, Spanish, Post-colonial, and Ethnic Studies. Although some consider the US-Mexico border a spectacle,⁶ this international boundary instigates a range of new questions about empire, subjectivity, and violence, as well as a return to older questions. It draws attention to the places where these quandaries play out and to its complex legacies, reverberations, and attenuations. The border, then, is not only an enforced division that transverses particular terrains but an imagined site that moves through the nation. The barbed wire cuts well after its crossing.

The Border Reader places selected works in conversation to highlight the *longue durée* of intellectual production and critical reverberations instigated by the US-Mexico divide. It is for this reason that *The Border Reader* moves thematically, rather than chronologically, placing certain interventions at the forefront. Clearly, there are significant omissions. The literature on this region is rich, deserving, and underappreciated. We didn't include literature on populations of the region, for example, worthy of a reader of their own.

The first section, "Locating the Border," suggests that the US-Mexico border region can serve as a fertile site for understanding borders, migrations, and other movements across the globe. In the border region, people and nation-states negotiate power, citizenship, cultural citizenship, and related processes as well as questions of empire. In this respect, "American empire," as Gilbert González and Raúl Fernández argue, fueled twentieth-century Mexican immigration to the United States. Moving toward understanding how immigration and criminal law constitute legal violence, Cecilia Menjívar and Leisy J. Abrego show how Central Americans experience border crossing and life thereafter. Gilberto Rosas captures the lessons from the border as a space of death, life, and subjection, as they relate to asylum and related legal proceedings. Alejandro Lugo provides a critical exemplification of locating the border as a site of theory-making. Transfeminist Sayak Valencia Triana insists on the geopolitical coordinates of the other side of the border, Tijuana, Baja California, in this case, to underline the "spectacular violence" of criminal syndicates in Mexico and their complexity with dominant regimes of masculinity, globalization, and the Mexican government. In sum, these contributions underline how imperial projects rework relationships of power in the US-Mexico border region for some, and erode the hegemonies of the US and Mexico evident the region for others.

The following section of *The Border Reader*, “Documenting Identities,” takes stock of the undocumented identities in the actual border region and the borderlands of academic discourses. The selections speak to some of the shifting analytical paradigms that have reframed our understanding of the US-Mexico border by underscoring the complexity, dynamisms, and diversity of peoples inhabiting and moving through this contested space. In a look at quotidian expression, Américo Paredes provides a study of Mexican machismo and challenges the extent to which machismo is unique to Mexico and Mexican culture. Drawing on notions of racialization, as well as government documents and policies, Martha Menchaca’s contribution underscores the often-repressed and overlooked racial histories of contemporary Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Offering a critical understanding of the intersectionality of race and sexuality for Mexican migrants, Lionel Cantú reconfigures understandings of queer communities across borders. Patricia Zavella’s chapter “Migrations,” excerpted from her influential *I’m Neither Here nor There*, documents how gender inflects the undocumented migrant self, mobilizing a concept that she refers to as “peripheral vision” that is inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa.

Although themes of gender and sexuality infuse this reader, “En/Gendering Borders” elaborates on the gendered contours of life at the border and in border thinking. Renato Rosaldo’s pioneering “Changing Chicano Narratives” underlines a shift to Chicana foundational figures in border thinking. Sonia Saldivar-Hull’s “Feminism on the Border” conjures an expansive vision of feminism that renders visible the intersections of gender, class, and race that shape the lived experiences of women of color. Martha Balaguera draws on border theory, participant observation and interviews conducted with *chicas trans* at migrant shelters in Mexico, this study sheds light on how gender and geographical transitions shape each other, blurring distinctions of shelter and homelessness, motion and boundedness, and freedom and unfreedom. José Limón contrasts a Chicano carnivalesque barbeque scene with certain dominant Mexican discourses about masculinity and in spite of its deep gendered contradictions.

The following section, “Othering Spaces, Othering Bodies,” engages with scholarship on the body and space at the intersection of race, immigration, and deviance. The selected readings explore the multiple ways through which the US-Mexico border has become imagined as a site of “illegality,” how immigrant bodies themselves become racialized and excluded from the body politic, and how dead immigrant bodies serve as sites for Mexican and US governments to assert authority. The physical border is reinforced not only through militarization but through cultural imaginings and the desire for an orderly social world juxtaposed by disorder, chaos, and feelings of lawlessness projected onto sister cities such as El Paso and Juárez or Tijuana and San Diego. The fantasy

and the reality transform the people, products, and wildlife that pass through these spaces. White middle-class Americans in San Diego, as Ramón Gutiérrez shows, demarcate the dividing line that spatially separates an orderly and pure America from a deviant Tijuana. Bodies are categorized, examined, and placed within or outside discourses of belonging. Advancing a historical analysis of race, immigration, and disability, Natalia Molina offers an examination of how public health and immigration discourses defined Mexican immigrants as culturally or physically unfit for citizenship. Eithne Luibhéid's "Looking Like a Lesbian" exemplifies how the policing of identities at the US-Mexico ports of entry consolidate heteronormative identities. Alicia Schmidt Camacho calls on us to consider migrant melancholia as a framework to understand not only the material consequences of immigration but also its psychological toll, as expressed through narratives that constitute a political act against the substantive erosion of citizenship.

The works in "Border Crossings" render these experiences visible and chart the material consequences of migration. Roberto Gonzales and Leo Chavez capture the nightmares of illegality, how certain youth are situated in regimes of despair, marginality, and hopelessness. Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez's "Regions of Refuge in the United States" which crosses the border in its own right and draws on the work of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1979), maps the lived contours of Mexican immigrant and Mexican American communities who make up impoverished and socially stratified urban and rural ecologies of the United States, and how people both thrive and suffer in these restrictive/spaces. Recasting the debates on undocumented migration, Néstor Rodríguez asserts that undocumented crossings by laborers should be considered a political act in defiance of state regulation. In an effort to reveal the relational racial construction of indigeneity across borders, Mireya Loza places indigenous Mexican communities at the center and recasts the history of the Bracero Program.

Emergent border, post-border, and anti-border panoramas are explored in the final section, "New Cultural Imaginaries." Néstor García Canclini explains hybridity as he sees it developing in Tijuana in a conversation with Fiamma Montezemolo. In unpacking border epistemes, scholars have highlighted new narratives about experiences along the borderlands. Rosa-Linda Fregoso delves into border femicides, in an essay charting the politics of witnessing. In an effort to contextualize the relationship between mass incarceration and immigration, Kelly Lytle Hernández calls for a reexamination of the origins of immigration control. As both a personal exploration, an archaeological rumination of border history, and a piece of border poetics, Gloria Anzaldúa vindicates the in-betweenness of Chicana/o identities that stems from their positionality in the geographical and metaphysical space of the borderlands. The power of a

hybrid language and fluid identities are inherently subversive to the very systems of oppression that produced them. Closing this reader, María Josephina Saldaña Portillo, in “Wavering on the Horizon of Social Being,” underlines the racial governmentalities unleashed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and its insistence on stripping away Mexican character and holding in abeyance savage Indianness in order to receive the benefits of United States citizenship.

The Border Reader demands an examination of border subjectivities as produced by and in between multiple nations and uneven relationships of power and privilege. Historically and culturally, communities grapple with the meaning and the consequences of this relationship as it is experienced politically, spatially, and corporeally in their daily lives, their complex relations, their feelings, and their rich and creative cultural expressions.⁷

NOTES

- 1 See Gilberto Rosas, *Barrio Libre: Criminalizing States and Delinquent Refusals of the New Frontier* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
- 2 Some of the earliest vigilantes of the border, the Texas Rangers, worked to bring about a new racial order on the state level, while later groups were organized on the federal level to enforce laws that restricted entry. By 1904 men hired to patrol the border by the US Immigration Service assigned a keen group of officers to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act. They also looked to exclude immigrants infected with contagious diseases, illiterates, and those too poor to pay the head tax. Later, these men would turn their eye toward what they deemed were dangerous rabble-rousers of the Mexican Revolution. For more on the Texas Rangers and Texas border violence see Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Elliot Young, *Catarino Garza's Revolution on the Texas-Mexico Border* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). For more on the history of the Border Patrol see Kelly Lytle Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the US Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
- 3 For some of the expansive literature on the militarization of the border, border securitization, and related frameworks see Miguel Antonio Levorio, *Militarizing the Border: When Mexicans Became the Enemy* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2012). Also see Rosas, *Barrio Libre*. It draws on Timothy J. Dunn, *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992: Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine Comes Home* (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, 1996); Jonathan Xavier Inda, *Targeting Immigrants: Government, Technology, Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the “Illegal Alien” and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York: Routledge, 2002); and Miguel Diaz-Barriga and Margaret E. Dorsey, *Fencing In Democracy: Borders Walls, Necrocitizenship, and the Security State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).
- 4 See, for example, Josiah Heyman, “The Mexico-United States Border in Anthropology: A Critique and Reformulation,” *Journal of Political Ecology* 1, no. 1 (1994): 43-66.

- 5 See Robert R. Alvarez, “The Mexican-US Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 447–70.
- 6 On the border as spectacle, see Nicholas P. De Genova, “Migrant ‘Illegality’ and Deportability in Everyday Life,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (October 1, 2002): 419–47.
- 7 See Alex E. Chavez, *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017) for some of the latest literature on transborder expressive culture and politics.

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