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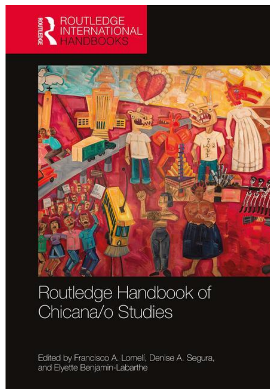

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10

Discourses of violence and peace

About and on the U.S.-Mexico border

María Socorro Tabuenca

Staging the narrative

On 16 June 2015, during his presidential announcement address, Donald Trump declared:

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. . . . They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. . . . I will build a great, great wall on our southern border and I will have Mexico pay for that wall.
>
> *(www.businessinsider.com/donald-trumps-epic-statement-on-mexico-2015-7)*

Presidential candidate Trump's assertions caused either immediate criticism or support spread through media and social networks. Many believed he did not have a chance to win the Republican party's presidential nomination and that he would soon be out of the race. However, the success of his fierce discourse was demonstrated when he became the U.S. Republican Party's presidential nominee and, several months later, the president of the United States. For those of us who have been living on the U.S.-Mexico border most of our lives, trans-border dwellers, *fronterizas/os* (inhabitants of the Mexican side of the border), Chicanas/os, Mexicanas/os, Latinas/os, Hispanics, Indigenous peoples, and "others," Trump's comments and his nomination were not shocking. His words merely echo the discriminatory Anglo narratives towards Mexicans that have been heard for years, both before and after Mexico lost a significant part of its territory to the United States in 1848 and 1853. President Trump's remarks also reiterate the state of violence our ancestors endured during and after the U.S. settlement and conquest of the West, as well as the underlying and/or open violence we experience on a daily basis whether we live on one side or the other of the geo-political border.

For a number of decades, writers and scholars from various disciplines have examined the attitudes of Anglo American settlers and colonizers towards Mexicans and Spaniards before and after the U.S.-Mexico border was defined. The depictions of Mexicans before the annexation of Texas into the Union included being "lazy, ignorant, cheating, gambling, thieving, sinister, cruel, cowardly half-breeds, incapable of self-government or material progress" (Weber 1988, p. 158). By the end of the 19th century, those representations had a minor shift as Anglos constructed

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images of Mexicans based on the opposite moral values by which they defined themselves: Mexicans were portrayed as "mysterious, romantic, fun-loving, and colorfully primitive, or alternatively conniving, highly sexualized, disorderly, lazy, violent, and uncivilized" (Klahn 1994, p. 31). Consequently, Trump's pejorative opinions are not far from those of 200 years ago. He has only modernized the qualifiers: instead of "highly-sexualized, sinister, cruel, violent, and uncivilized," he utilizes "rapists, criminals, drug lords." Just as his predecessors did, he defines and constructs Mexicans with his alleged values. When Trump mentions "they are not sending you" he means "you, the morally superior," "you, who are not criminals, like Mexicans." Also, as the pioneers did, Trump has turned his narrative into a performative act that becomes a means of communication as well as a redefinition of power in and out of the United States. He has transformed the physical border into a symbolic weapon that contains a heavy load of historical, cultural, sociopolitical, economic, racial, ethnic, and linguistic fears, threats, and desires that impact Mexicanas/os outside the United States. At the same time, the "border wall" becomes a symbolic weapon in U.S. territory that strives to reinforce the political hegemony translated into racial, cultural, economic, and constitutional injustices against *fronteriza/os*, Chicanas/os, Mexicanas/os, Latinas/os, Hispanics, Indigenous peoples, African Americans, and "others" that persist to this day.

Trump's rhetoric and success in securing one political party's presidential nomination and ascendency to the presidency itself allows me to reflect on two concerns that I have held for a long time. One is about how my personal narrative as a *fronteriza-Mexicana-Chicana* living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border[1] locates and negotiates my own research. The other concern is how my research projects have impacted my life and my own perceptions, narratives and prejudices on "the border." For the purpose of this chapter, President Trump's remarks are relevant because they are embedded in a never-ending story of verbal and physical violence, criminalization, bigotry, rape, murder, intellectual colonialism, linguistic terrorism, cultural tyranny, and/or obliteration that we have experienced more than once in our lives. In other words, his discourse is part of the systematic and systemic violence towards us and our people in this country. This chapter seeks to contribute to a broader spectrum of border thinking, and rethinking borders (Welchman 1996) by examining key theoretical studies, cultural artifacts, and discourses, state-enforced acts of violence, femicide, and drug violence as well as personal stories and prejudices. I aim to dialogue with those who are interested in the challenging and sometimes "uncomfortable borderlands of words and silence" (Cáliz-Montoro 2000, p. viii).

Border accounts: past and present

The materialization of the U.S.-Mexico border as a geopolitical, cultural, and psychological space originates in the 19th century after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and the reestablishment of new borders until 1889. Before this settlement, an array of people with different purposes circulated through its ample territory such as Indian peoples, traders, travelers, miners, bandits, trappers, entrepreneurs, farmers, soldiers, evangelists, explorers, land seekers, etc. Many of them left personal diaries, letters, scientific essays, military or government reports with their observations and comments of the lands as well as the people they encountered. Some of these narratives favored the war with Mexico, based on the idea of the Manifest Destiny (Blum 1985, pp. 277–297). As explained by Arnoldo de León (1983), racial sentiments from Anglo settlers against *Mexicanos-Tejanos* were manifest since their arrival. Anglos arrived "to redeem [Texas] from the wilderness – to settle it with an intelligent, honorable and interprising [*sic*] people," as stated by Stephen F. Austin (de León, p. 4). Anglos compared Mexicans

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with Native Americans and African Americans. They "were not about to elevate Mexicans to European whiteness; their own sense of superiority turned *Tejanos* into a people lesser than themselves" (de León, p. 8). Phrases such as, "I look on the Mexicans as scarce more than apes," "[Mexicans] are as ignorant as Negros and Indians," "half-Negroes-half Indian greasers," "[t]heir occupation seems to consist, principally, in removing fleas and lice from each other, drinking *pulque*, smoking cigars, when they can, and sleeping," and, "[they are] lazy gossiping people" (Weber 1988, pp. 156–158) were common and widely accepted.

Narratives of Mexicans as uncivilized, indolent, and incapable of governing themselves were aggressive but the social, cultural, and legal practices during this time period were brutal. They went from lynching, shooting, and burning "thousands of people from Mexican descent" (Carrigan & Webb 2013, p. 1) to "ethnocentric and racist attitudes [that resulted] . . . in a culturally and politically subordinated population" (Vélez-Ibáñez 1996, p. 62). After the U.S.-Mexico war, many (if not most) Mexicans were dispossessed of wealth, land, language, education, and culture (Acuña 1972). Alongside land dispossession and political disenfranchisement, derogatory labeling of Mexicans as "un-American," "minority," "disadvantaged," "limited English proficiency," or "underclass" proliferated. The cultural referent "Mexican" became negatively layered with seemingly legitimate stereotypes that made it a term to be erased and not used (Vélez-Ibáñez, p. 71).

The cultural and geographical border has served as a justification for systemic brutality that comprises ethno-racial discrimination at all levels. Examples of this aggression can be observed across various social arenas. With respect to employment, Chicanas/os report being denied promotions in their jobs, not being hired based on their racial appearance, experiencing hostile interactions with white supervisors, and having difficulties with clients or customers who reject their help (Ruiz 2008; García-López 2008). In the school system Mexican Americans describe incidents such as teachers and professors having low expectations on their performance, assuming students don't speak English, getting in trouble for speaking Spanish, and being called "wetback" or other derogatory names (Yosso 2006; Yosso et al. 2009). Students in K-12 often experience violence (physical or psychological) from their peers. Chicana/o youth also describe having similar experiences in their neighborhoods or with law enforcement officers (Lopez 2009). Other incidents include being denied service in restaurants, or receiving poor services in stores (Ortiz & Telles 2012). Statistically, these impressions have been confirmed by agencies such as the PEW Research Center and the U.S. Bureau of the Census, which find:

1) About half of Latinas/os in the United States (52%) say they have experienced discrimination or have been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity (Krogstad & López 2016).
2) According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 39% of Mexicans in the United States, 25 years and older, did not have high school diplomas in 2013 and 10% had earned bachelor's degrees (U.S. Census Bureau 2013a, Table 6).
3) In 2012, 35% of Mexican-origin females under the age of 18 lived below the poverty level compared with 12.8% of white, non-Hispanic young women (U.S. Census Bureau 2013c, Table 22).
4) In a study conducted by Rutgers University, 22% of Hispanic/Latina/o workers reported experiencing workplace discrimination, compared to only 6% of whites (Dixon et al. 2002, p. 8). Working in discriminatory conditions often leads to depression, lack of self-confidence, bitterness, and withdrawal from work.
5) In 2014, Hispanic females earn roughly 61 cents for every dollar earned by a white, non-Hispanic males (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015, Table 16).

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6) In 2015, Chicanas/os had the highest dropout rate (10.4%) for students ages 16 through 24. The dropout rate for white students in this age group was 4.5% (National Center for Education Statistics 2017).
7) Roughly 32% of Chicanas/os and Mexicans in the United States lack health coverage (U.S. Census Bureau 2013b, Table 28).
8) In May 2017, Texas signed a law authorizing local authorities to ask about individuals' immigration status and requiring local law enforcement to adhere to federal requests that they detain criminal suspects for questioning and potential deportation. With this law, Texas became the latest state to embrace the "show me your papers" policies currently in place in Arizona, Alabama, and Utah (Penton 2017).

To the acts of violence and violent behavior provoked by individuals, the state and/or its enforcement agencies, I include the killings of Chicanas/os and Mexicans in the United States as well as those on the Mexican side by Border Patrol agents. According to a joint investigation by the *Washington Monthly* and the Investigative Fund at the National Institute, "over the past five years U.S. border agents have shot across the border at least ten times, killing a total of six Mexicans on Mexican soil" (Frey 2013). When the journalist investigated if any of these people were criminals, Frey states:

> it turned out that most of the victims weren't even migrants, but simply residents of Mexican border towns, like José Antonio Elena Rodríguez, who either did something that looked suspicious to an agent or were nearby when border agents fired at someone else.
>
> *(Frey 2013)*

In addition to these murders, there is the abuse and mistreatment of Mexicans on both sides of the border from Customs or Immigration officers while crossing from either side of the border to the other, often from Mexican Customs or Immigration officers who want to charge them money for letting them pass beyond the border cities. In the United States abuse occurs under the aegis of operations originated or approved in Washington, D.C., including Operation Interception, Operation Hold the Line, Operation Gatekeeper, and blockades after September 11th, as well as local procedures and officers' actions to detain or even harm immigrants. The malevolence of these aggressions is such that in many cases it is so internalized that people do not notice it or they accept it without question. Sometimes, as we have seen with the Republican candidate, now president, Latinas/os end up supporting those hostile narratives, even though many public opinion polls in America have condemned anti-Mexican, anti-immigrant, and anti-ethnic comments.

Confrontational narratives not only originate from the United States, they also emanate from Mexican intellectuals, writers, and politicians involved in Mexico's nation-building. As a consequence, Mexican and U.S. respective national discourses of identity have affected attitudes among Mexicans from both sides of the border and exacerbated tensions between diverse groups (Vila 1994, 2000, 2003; Zúñiga 1997, 1998). Both Vila and Zúñiga found more differences than similarities among Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Chicanas/os, undocumented, and other border identities. One important difference is that Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os construct their identities in relation to non-Hispanic white Americans as well as in relation to Mexicans who live on both sides of the border and beyond.

Fronteriza/os Juarenses in Vila's study construct their identity in relation to *chilanga/os*, people from the "*South*." His study found that *fronteriza/os*, Chicanas/os and Mexican Americans are often viewed as constituting a homogeneous group. Although this perception is not true given

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the socioeconomic, political, and historical differences between these groups, such views can exacerbate group tensions; systemic discrimination in access to education, employment, and housing; and unequal treatment by institutional actors.

One important example of tensions among these groups occurred just prior to the signing of NAFTA. On 19 September 1993, the Border Patrol, led by Silvestre Reyes, exercised a new strategy to stop undocumented migration in El Paso, Texas. He deployed all the officers on duty "to form a human and vehicle blockade along the border" (Dowd n.d.) in order to block the flux of immigrants right at the "line" instead of having officers patrolling the streets. According to opinion polls, 80% to 90% of El Paso residents supported the measure. If we take into account that 75% of the population in this area is Mexican American, some of whom arrived 25 years prior, Reyes's operation and the local residents' acceptance of this action reflect a high level of social distance and negative views between Mexicans and Mexican (un)documented immigrants (Zúñiga 1998, p. 20). "They were blamed for most social problems in El Paso: crime, drugs, unemployment, welfare fraud" (Vila in Zúñiga 1998, p. 22), the same way they are being blamed by Trump and his followers. Another notable illustration on how anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican discourses directly impact people's actions and policies, regardless of their political party, was in 1996 when Silvestre Reyes won a Democratic seat in Congress with the campaign slogan that he had stopped undocumented migration into the United States. On 30 March 2016, Trump was endorsed by the Border Patrol Union, an endorsement that no candidate had ever received. Facing this systemic and systematic racist and intra-ethnic violence, the following questions come to mind: How much of this violence can we Mexicans and other Latinas/os stand? Who wins with these narratives? Who is hurt or perishes because of them?

Retracing border theories and discourses in the U.S.-Mexico border

The concept of "the border" and the symbolic and geographic image of the Mexico-U.S. border (and beyond) has been the subject of numerous theoretical debates for more than three decades across numerous disciplines (Segura & Zavella 2007). Scholars have used it as a mechanism to elucidate the complex sociocultural processes of the region, such as global economics, immigration, asymmetry, languages, cultures, and cultural productions. As cultural anthropologist and borderlands scholar Renato Rosaldo said:

> The art of interpreting the literal border today involves the simultaneous analysis of the theater and its symbolic dimensions as well as the actual violence. One should not become so constructivist as not to notice that people are being killed . . . as not to notice its symbolic dimensions.
>
> *(Rosaldo 1998, p. 635)*

As a metaphor, the "border" has been the core of multicultural and postcolonial theories as well as the foundation of Cultural Studies, Border Studies, Chicana/o Studies, and Latina/o Studies, as its conceptualization has been instrumental to deconstruct hegemonic-monolithic discourses. The main debate (regarding the characteristics of border culture) has occurred among theorists celebrating border cultural hybridity (e.g., Anzaldúa 1987; García Canclini 1995; Rosaldo 1998) and a number of important respondents, including Pablo Vila (2000, 2003) and Heyman (1994 , 2012), who emphasize cultural and identity separation, distinction, and polarization.

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In previous works, when studying border literatures in the United States and in Mexico, I have elaborated on the significance of studying the concept/metaphor of the border as well as recognizing its regional geo-political implications that includes research across national borders. I have continuously underlined the importance of this transnational dialogue, because up until the mid-1990s U.S. libraries' catalogs and databases categorized border literature as a synonym of Chicana/o literature, with few instances related to the literature of exile. Fortunately, more than 20 years later, Northern Mexican border and literature have received broader exposure and libraries have included more diverse studies in their catalogs.

The theoretical discussion on the metaphorical and physical border owes an enduring debt to Gloria Anzaldúa's much-commented-on and cited *Borderlands/La Frontera*: *The New Mestiza* (1987). It is, perhaps, due to the impact of her work that a broader dialogue on "the border" developed in a number of academic disciplines since the mid-1980s. Anzaldúa critiques patriarchy, racism, sexism, and institutionalized forms of oppression. She points to the hegemonic inequality between the United States and Mexico, emphasizing the differences between the two countries. In one of her most famous quotes, she states:

> The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* (an open wound) where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country a border culture.
>
> *(Anzaldúa 1987, p. 25)*

In her work, Anzaldúa laments the separation of "two worlds" and creates a utopian space of the *borderlands* where new identities are constantly developing. In that space, or third country, Anzaldúa proposes a new culture born out of "*los atravesados*, the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short those who cross-over, pass-over or go through the confines of the normal" (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 3). She subverts the semantics of these identities, and she grants them a (new) place on the border, because they have no legitimate place in the hegemonic society. Anzaldúa also posits the emergence of a new border conscience and identity that allows for a multiple fragmentary subject.

Borderlands/La Frontera represents an emerging literature that delves into the myriad cultural, linguistic, and material border realities of *the new mestiza*. Twenty years later, the new *mestiza*'s reality continues to be the reality of many *mestizas/os* who inhabit the borderlands and beyond. Anzaldúa's metaphorical space became the new Aztlán for Chicana/o scholars. While Aztlán remained as the foundational place for Chicana/o culture, the borderlands appeared as a more open space where there was room for many possibilities, and for almost everyone. Chicana/o literary critics in the United States began "remap[ping] the borderlands of theory and theorists," just as Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar proposed in *Criticism in the Borderlands* (1991, p. 7). They suggest that the *frontera* is the new Chicana/o *habitat*. Following this new paradigm, José David Saldívar, in *The Dialectics of Our America* (1991), opens the map to borders beyond the United States and Mexico, and places mainstream Latin American writers and their connections with Chicana/o literature in the core of his study. Through this new cartography of North/South, he posits "a new transgeographical conception of American culture – one more responsive to the hemisphere's geographical and political crosscurrents than to the narrow national ideologies" (Saldívar 1991, xi).

In 1997, Saldívar published *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*, in which he continues reshaping the map he started in *The Dialectics of the Americas*; and through this

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reconstruction, he "challenge[s the] stable and naturalized hegemonic status of the national by looking at the assumed equivalence we make between the natural and the cultural" (p. 14). To achieve his objective, he uses literary texts, *corridos*, performances, popular songs, essays, folklore, and art. However, in *Border Matters*, Saldívar engages in an open theoretical and political conversation driven by the historical events in which the geo-political border plays a key role. These events included the approval of Proposition 187 in California,[2] the militarization of the border, riots, and enforcement methods on Mexicans and Central Americans. In this sense, *Border Matters* becomes Saldívar's symbolic weapon to oppose discursive and actual violence against Chicanas/os-Latinas/os in the United States.

Walter Mignolo, in *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000), goes beyond Saldívar's pan-American map because he develops an in-depth analysis "on the colonial question." Mignolo presents a powerful examination of the discussions on the idea of the border in U.S., Latin America, Caribbean, European, and British Commonwealth literature. For Mignolo, the crucial point is what he calls "border gnosis" or "border thinking," a structure that offers him the opportunity to imagine the possibility of "theorizing from the border" (309). The "border thinking" he is proposing does not come simply by dwelling on the border, but by creating a border consciousness, and exercising theory and practice. As L. Elena Delgado and Rolando J. Romero have asserted, Mignolo's project "forces [us] to think about the ethics and politics of teaching and research, the institutional production of knowledge, and our investment in perpetuating both colonial differences and social injustices" (2000, p. 7).

There are growing numbers of Chicana/o academics dialoguing with Mexican border theories and literatures as well as with scholars from the Mexican side. Luis Leal and Francisco Lomelí have been pioneers in establishing an intra-ethnic and cross-border dialogue since the mid-1980s; Norma Cantú, Debra Castillo, Manuel de Jesús Hernández, María Socorro Tabuenca, Miguel López, Javier Durán, and Santiago Vaquera re-established the conversation during the 1990s and have continued to work on this project. Young scholars such as Christine Sisk, Jorge Camps, Graciela Silva Rodríguez, and Antonio Cárdenas Contreras, among others, are extending this conversation.

In reviewing various texts in other disciplines regarding "border theories," I encounter comparable hierarchies to those involved with border cultural studies and literature. Thus, I have seen more attempts at establishing a conversation between North and South, although that conversation is carried out mostly in English, and by U.S. and European presses. If one browses the Internet looking for "border theories," one finds an extensive list of scholarly works from various disciplines. Most of the works cited are written in English with diverse topics regarding geographical, economic, political, linguistics, psychological, and cultural borders. On the other hand, when one looks for "*teorías de fronteras*" (borderlands theories) or "*teorías de la frontera*" (theories of the border), one finds far less material, and most refer to geographical borderlands in Latin America, psychological borders, black holes, and gendered borders. When studying the U.S.-Mexico border, many U.S. scholars do not have the practice to search thoroughly what has been done in Mexican institutions. Could it be that the symbolic wall that President Trump wishes to concretize also works in our academic world? Could we be, as Delgado and Romero (2000) asks, "perpetuating both colonial differences and social injustices?"

Cultural and border studies in the Mexico-U.S. border

In Mexico, the concept of "the border," both ideological and geographic, gained significant scholarly attention during the 1980's. The concept has been steadily developing and is used widely in the United States and other parts of the world to analyze sociocultural processes that

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happen in the places where people seek safe spaces or a homeland. According to Eduardo Barrera, the U.S.-Mexico border transformed during the 1980s:

> from a marginalized and stigmatized geographic area and academic subject to . . . a fashionable trope to illustrate global and national changes. . . . On the Mexican side, the border was seldom an aesthetic or academic subject until the boom of 'border cinema' . . . and the boom of immigration and *maquiladora* studies.
>
> *(Barrera 1996, p. 187)*

Research on cultural studies on the Mexican northern border focus on the discourses regarding the border and its dwellers. The most widespread master narratives from 1848 to the mid-1980s were: the border as a brothel, the border as a crossing/migratory/passing site, the border as a place of easy cultural penetration, and the border as a place of gambling and smuggling. These discourses were not only in writing. Mexican film projected a distorted image of the border territory as well (Iglesias 1991; Maciel 1990). The dissemination of these discourses was due to a number of factors including the negligence of cultural policies from the federal government towards the North. Studies attempted to prove if any of these discourses were based on objective facts or if they were only the result of a performative act of speech from the perceptions inscribed and repeated for almost a century.

Jorge Bustamante conducted a comparative study on the use of Spanish in cities along the Mexico-U.S. border, as well as in cities in central Mexico and the southern Pacific coast, to research whether border Spanish was "contaminated" by English, and if, as a consequence, border population were perceived as *pocha* (assimilated) or *vendida* (a sell-out). The results showed that border people didn't mix languages and tried to keep Spanish as "pure" as possible as evidence of their national identity. Border people constructed their image based on resisting Central Mexico hegemonic discourse. They believed that by speaking "pure" Spanish they were defending their national identity. For Bustamante:

> the border inhabitant relies in the reaffirmation of traditional values learned from the elders and which is reproduced in family relations, relying, perhaps intuitively, on the values of his/her own Mexicaness, stimulated by the contrast with the cultural otherness which he/she is interacting.
>
> *(1992, p. 99)*

Eduardo Barrera calls such discursive attitudes viewing the border as the "site of reaffirmation of the national identity." Víctor Zúñiga (1997, 1998) has similar conclusions obtained from comprehensive research he conducted regarding Northern artists and cultural promoters' attitudes towards cultural policies in Mexico. For Zúñiga the results revealed that there were three main discourses on the border: *La frontera norte como trinchera cultural* (the border as a cultural trench); *el Norte como desierto cultural* (the North as cultural desert); and *la frontera norte como orilla cultural* (the northern border as a cultural edge). The image of the border as a cultural trench is similar to the one we observed in Bustamante. In Zúñiga's study, the narratives constructed by *fronterizas/os* and *norteños* (northerners) opposed the national discourse. They express that *fronterizas/os* are "heroes" because by maintaining Mexican cultural values and the Spanish language "uncontaminated," they are defending against strong U.S. cultural infiltration. They see the border as a cultural trench, wall, or bastion that will stop U.S. culture from entering Mexico and Latin America. Thus, *fronterizas/os* are using the geo-political space to build a symbolic trench or wall to stop "U.S. culture" from entering not only Mexico, but Latin America as well.

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Zúñiga's category of "*la frontera como desierto cultural*" (the border as a cultural desert) dialogues with a famous phrase from José Vasoncelos, one of the most influential Mexican intellectuals. In a description of a trip to New York, Vasconcelos narrates:

> Entre estas dos civilizaciones, la española mexicana que tiene de foco la capital mexicana y la anglosajona que tiene como núcleo a Nueva York y a Boston hay una extensa no man's land del espíritu, un desierto de las almas, una barbarie.
>
> *(1982, p. 125)*

> (Between these two civilizations, the Spanish Mexican that has as a point of reference the Mexican capital and the Anglo-Saxon which has its nucleus in New York and Boston, there is an extensive no man's land of the spirit, a desert of the soul, a barbarism.)
>
> *(1982, p. 125)*

As a result, perceptions that Northern Mexico lacked culture were based on the idea of culture as high culture. Therefore in generalized comparisons between Mexico City's cultural infrastructure and cultural life as well as colonial architecture, Zúñiga explains that the metaphor of the "cultural desert" is based on the supposition that because Northern Mexico does not have a visible pre-Columbian civilization, nor its ruins, it lacks cultural heritage; and if it has "some" cultural heritage, it was taken from U.S. pop culture. In that sense, Northern border peoples are "uprooted," "sellouts," and "lack national identity." What Zúñiga explains when he refers to "the border as an edge" is his informants' spatial and geographical considerations. The edge, for *fronteriza/o* artists and cultural advocates, functions as a cultural and geographical periphery where inclusionary cultural policies and practices can be possible, including exchange with the U.S. side of the border, something that was not seen in the other categories. Through this metaphor, he foresees a shift in cultural policies' discrimination from Mexico City to the border region; and perhaps a transformation in cultural hegemonic practices. In the narratives where Zúñiga analyzes these practices, information shows that hegemonic cultural practices would include cultural differences and promote cultural diversity in Mexico (Zúñiga 1997, p. 204). Zúñiga notes that, in these narratives, *fronterizas/os* were more willing to include exchanges with artists and writers *del otro lado* (the other side). These exchanges will not intervene or oppose the narratives of the "bastion of national identity." Artists and cultural promoters' acceptance to dialogue with U.S. artists does not mean an open door to U.S. cultural imperialism.

Notwithstanding the numerous specific studies from different disciplines, including Cultural Studies, José Manuel Valenzuela considers that:

> Existen pocos esfuerzos sistemáticos de teorización acerca de la frontera, a pesar de que en los últimos años tal tema ha adquirido nueva relevancia en los debates de las teorías multiculturalistas, postcolonialistas, y en los estudios culturales.
>
> *(2003, p. 33)*

> (There exist few systematic efforts to theorize about the border, despite the fact this topic recently has acquired new importance in the debates about theories in multicultural, postcolonial and cultural studies.)
>
> *(2003, p. 33)*

In a rigorous and thorough review of the works regarding narratives on the border, Valenzuela registers several notions where border analytical positions and metaphors are rooted.

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Some of these concepts refer to the border as loss, rupture, betrayal, bridge, wall, interstices, and transnationalization.

In "*Centralidad de las fronteras, procesos socioculturales en la frontera México-Estados Unidos*" (The Central Role of Borders and Socio-cultural Processes in the Mexico-U.S. Border), Valenzuela (2003) divides key theoretical approaches into three large groups. He calls the first approach "Metáforas emocionales de la frontera" (Emotional metaphors of the border). In this section, he presents several narratives from the late 1880s through the mid-1980s. Mexican impressions concentrated on the concepts of loss and rupture and were driven by feelings of uncertainty and fear as well as a strong nationalism. Sentiments focused on the border territory, its peoples, and also about territories and peoples beyond the border; especially people from the "*otro México*." The loss of the territory was still latent, and post-Revolutionary nationalistic views influenced their perceptions. "M*exicana/os del otro lado"* (Mexicans from the other side) as well as *fronterizas/os* were considered Americanized, and impure: American because they mix the Spanish and English languages and also are assumed to "lose" Mexican culture in favor of assimilation into U.S. norms. As a consequence of the *pochas/os* linguistic and cultural "impurity," the negative construction of the *pocho* began. Intrinsic to those ideas was a sense of "betrayal," of "denial of *Mexicanness*," of selling out to the gringos. Such ideas were disseminated not only in their writings, but also in film. *Pochas/os* were guilty of México's *mutilación, herida abierta* (mutilation, open wound) (Valenzuela 2003, p. 39). Regrettably, this is a very strong perception that many Mexicans still have.

The *intelligentsia*'s opinions were embraced by other influential writers and expanded the border semantics. Aside from being "uprooted cities," inhabited by sellouts, *pochas/os*, and renegades, border cities on the Mexican side acquire the epithet of "*ciudades del vicio*" (cities of vice), "*ciudades de perdición*" (sinful cities), and "*ciudades de paso*" (transient cities). Thus, the border is a place of damnation, and its dwellers are gamblers, *coyotes* (hired smugglers for immigrants), drug dealers, prostitutes, and, lately, rapists and assassins. In other words, the discourse persists that we, *fronterizas/os*, Chicanas/os, or Latinas/os, are rootless and ruthless peoples. These narratives and stereotypes have been used as a symbolic weapon, and in the interpersonal and cultural levels have caused a more violent and dangerous fracture than the fence, the river, and the real and symbolic wall between the United States and Mexico, between Mexico and the United States, between Northern and Central Mexicans, between *fronterizas/os*, Mexicana/os, Chicanas/os, and Latinas/os.

Valenzuela's second approach falls into the category of "*Ámbitos e intersticios transfronterizos*" (sites of trans-border interstices). This section focuses on scholarly works from the 1980s, which include hegemonic discourses such as biologist, nativist, assimilationists, cultural, and plural theories. These studies will give us a more inclusive and understanding view of the borders and their peoples. Valenzuela's review on this section focuses more on non-Mexican approaches such as Mexamerica.[3] He attempts to analyze the complex and numerous cultural relationships between Mexico and the United States, expanding the border from Mexico City to Pittsburgh and Chicago. Opposite to these perspectives, but also positioning the border in the space in between two nations, Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) describes the complex sociocultural, political, economic, and historical processes of the border. Other studies that have been successful in explaining the problematical processes of the border are those that apply the transnationalization and transnational approaches. Following Smith and Guarnizo (1998), Valenzuela signals that these methods should be carefully used because there is a tendency to talk about heterogeneous and multi-local processes without observing if the processes generated resistance in the population or not (2003, p. 51).

Valenzuela presents the last approach as "*Migración y cultura*" (Migration and culture). The inclusion of migration and culture to the study of borders is key to understanding the numerous

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changes a particular community presents with time. Migrants travel and carry an array of cultural capital that are transmitted and transformed in the new land. If they ever go back to their communities, they take a different cultural capital with them as a result of all the experiences involved in the process. One valuable concern from some critics who have been studying the discourses about the border from and outside the border is that when theorists and artists use the metaphor of migration and migrants to explain border processes, there is a danger of obliterating real migrants who suffer from racist discourses and practices, and who may die in their attempt to cross the border. Eduardo Barrera (1996), in his elaboration of "the border as the laboratory of postmodernity," following García Canclini's phrase (1995, p. 233), critiques the determinist view of García Canclini's border and border identities, such as the performances of artist Guillermo Gómez Peña, who appropriates the voice of the "Migrant" when declaring his own autonomy from the border. The ideas he is proposing are class, cultural intersection, vicinity, cultural appropriation, transculturation, innovation, cultural recreation, cultural resistance, cultural translation, inclusion/exclusion, and interpretation (pp. 54–63). Valenzuela considers that it is crucial to incorporate these analytical ideas within the analysis because without them it would be difficult to have a thorough conception of the region. In his conclusion he emphasizes the importance of studying cultural processes transnationally and deconstructing colonizing paradigms against *fronterizas/os* and Chicanas/os.

In looking into these discourses, specifically the ones referring to academic works on both U.S.-Mexico borders, there are three observations I would like to emphasize. First, in Chicana/o theoretical narratives of the border, the Mexican side of the border from the Mexican point of view or from Mexican border scholars is barely mentioned. On the other hand, Mexican border scholars tend to be more inclusive of U.S. and European theorists, and write in English and in Spanish; however, in the case of Valenzuela, he does not include Mexican scholars. Second, I noticed similar conclusions when studying the literatures of the borders: the border metaphor in the case of Chicana/o scholars alludes to a mythical place, even when scholars take the actual border and real situations between Mexico and the United States to develop their theories. Third, in Chicana/o critical theory, *fronterizas/os* are absent from the narratives and immigrants from Mexico and Central America have an important role in their writings; moreover, in Mexican approaches, there is a noticeable rejection of Chicanas/os and of *pochas/os* in the narratives from the first half of the 20th century. Finally, regarding both discourses, there is a call for the development of border thinking or border gnosis for a better understanding of both borders. How do we build those bridges in our discourses as well as in our daily and academic practices, and are we all willing to let border gnosis flourish?

Fronterizas/os and Chicanas/os: final considerations

My questionings throughout this chapter have led me to the final discourse, namely on how *fronterizas/os*, Chicanas/os, and Mexicana/os put theory into praxis during violent times. Since the mid-1980s and the "boom" of the *maquiladora* industry, the U.S.-Mexico border started to recraft its negative image. Economic prosperity and unemployment in main border cities, plus the implementation of urban development and federal cultural funding for projects along the Mexican northern border, have shifted the image of border cities, especially abroad. Thus, by the beginning of the 1990s, a narrative of success already in place paved the road for the public's acceptance of the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The discourse of "the border as modernization paradigm of Post-NAFTA Mexico" was presented "in the official discourse and the media as the paradigm of what the whole country would be, once a free trade agreement was signed as the culmination of neo-liberal policies" (Barrera 1996, p. 195). However, the

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paradigm of what the whole country would be started a few years before the signing of NAFTA, but with NAFTA in place, the image of the border as paradise sold by the Mexican and the U.S. government became a nightmare, at least for many families living in Juárez, Tijuana, Nogales, Nuevo Laredo, Ciudad Mier, Matamoros, and other border towns and also other places within Mexico. "The future of the country was based in the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, and industrial growth producing poverty faster than it distributes wealth" (Bowden 1996, p. 44), and underground economies, such as the ones produced by drug and human trafficking, were also taking advantages of people's impoverishment.

In June 1993, two months before Silvestre Reyes implemented his Operation Blockade in El Paso, the bodies of eight young women had appeared in the Juárez outskirts, raped, tortured, strangled, and mutilated. Even though the news was astonishing for both borders' population, since most victims were poor and allegedly migrants, sex workers, and exotic dancers, the crimes went unpunished and the population did very little to push authorities to find the assassin(s). A small group of women and some men led by Esther Chávez Cano, head of the group *8 de marzo*, started demonstrating on the streets and in front of the city hall, but achieved very little. In 1995, after a series of protests because the murderers continued and a "Prevention Campaign" published by the Juárez City Council in Juárez's newspapers that stigmatized the victims, the state government opened a Special District Attorney's Office (SDAO) in charge of investigating the killings. We looked at this action as a triumph, but the SDAO was a charade. It was commanded by district attorneys who followed a pattern of denying the problem, blaming the victims, planting evidence, and fabricating scapegoats. Regardless of our protests, editorials, conferences, demonstrations, and marches, the killings and impunity continued. By 1999 the victims of sexual serial femicide (systemic murders of women) reached 74 and the number of missing young women was unknown. Esther Chávez Cano started a campaign at the international level that included organizations such as Amnesty International, the Human Rights Watch, and various U.N. agencies. It was not until international pressure was stronger that the federal government paid more attention to the cases, but to this day they have not answered the main question: Who is killing the women of Juárez? (Tabuenca 2010, 2011).

Before the femicide in Juárez made news all over the world, the efforts of *El Paso Times* journalist Diana Washington Valdéz were fundamental. Her courageous investigative work in this field is vital for anyone doing research on this topic. Commitment and solidarity from Chicana/o community showed, and exchange began. A key element in the dissemination of femicide at the international level was the documentary *Señorita extraviada: Missing Young Women* (2001) by Chicana filmmaker Lourdes Portillo, which is a powerful chronicle of the events in Juárez that demonstrates commitment with Mexicanas on the border. The documentary is a call for solidarity and activism with women who have suffered the systematic and systemic violence of poverty as well as stigmatization while being alive, but also after their brutal murders.

Other acts of solidarity included several conferences, different NGOs and scholars organized on both sides of the border (Juárez, El Paso, Las Cruces), and even beyond: Los Angeles, Syracuse, Dartmouth, Ithaca, New York, New Haven, San Antonio, Austin, Chihuahua, Mexico City, Madrid, Berlin, France, and the Netherlands. Activism and academy became one of the backbones of the movement that claimed demanded justice. *Los Amigos de las Mujeres de Juárez*, founded in 2001 by Chicana professor Cynthia Bejarano in Las Cruces, has followed a group of mothers of the victims. Professors Miguel López in Albuquerque and Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba in Austin have been following the problem for more than 20 years, and Professor López has a comparative study with femicide in Guatemala, another border, another situation, and another bridge to build.

In 2003, Chicana/*fronteriza* scholar and writer Alicia Gaspar de Alba organized a conference at UCLA called "*Maquiladora* Murders, Or, Who is Killing the Women in Juárez?" where issues

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regarding free trade and other hegemonic practices had a direct impact on women's lives. In 2010, an edited volume, *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*, was published by the University of Texas Press. Julia Estela Monárrez, Irasema Coronado, Kathleen Staudt, César Fuentes, Luis Cervera, Zulma Méndez, Rosalinda Fregoso, Alicia Schmidt Camacho, Melissa W. Wright, and the other scholars already mentioned worked in individual and collective research on femicide.

Congresswoman Hilda Solis, from California, who attended the UCLA conference, was also very involved in this movement. In July 2007, she and 93 of her colleagues in the House of Representatives sent a bipartisan letter to Mexican President Felipe Calderón. The letter asked President Calderón to step up investigations into the murders and disappearances of over 400 women and girls in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua over the past 15 years. The letter also requested that the new administration strengthen efforts to combat violence against women throughout Mexico (Draeger 2007). Perhaps she received an official response from the Mexican government, but to this day we have not seen any results that have led to incarcerations.

In 2008, the post-NAFTA border paradise narrative became the paradigm of an everlasting storm of gunpowder and gore. Uncontrollable violence, due to drug turf control, turned the Mexican border into a desert. From 2008 to 2012, many cities looked like ghost-towns while army platoons and death squads, along with *sicarios* (hitmen), owned the streets. Individual killings, massive executions, extortions, and kidnappings could happen – and still happen – at any time and any place. Femicide blended into drug violence, and it was very hard to keep track of systemic sexual killings. Young women continued disappearing, and their bodies have not been found. Border dwellers fled the cities. Some to their hometowns in the south, others to border cities in the North. This was another kind of migration.

The Mexodus invasion brought life to U.S. border towns. Mexican business people or U.S. citizens who lived on the Mexican border established their businesses on the other side. This migration was not stopped by Reyes' former officers; it was more than welcomed. This was the time in which political asylum from Mexico had to be recognized by U.S. authorities, and was the time when Chicana/o and Mexican Jewish immigration lawyers worked *pro bono* for Mexicans in distress. Chicana/o writers Sarah Cortez and Sergio Troncoso tried to give an "immediate response" by editing a volume on personal experiences from a variety of border peoples along the border area, *Our Lost Border: Essays on Life Amid the Narco-Violence* (2013). In the Foreword to the book, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith asserts a wake-up call for the United States, "a clarion call to consider the danger, the economic drain and, consequently, our future as an effective nation" (pp. v–vii). Hinojosa's words go directly to the core of President Trump's, and others', narratives about the border and its peoples: We are blind to what is happening on the other side. It is easier for us to blame the "other," as many have done with immigrants, as Mexico blames the United States for buying drugs, as we all blame the other for the state of our world, of our humanity.

I ask myself, if in times of obvious systemic violence we *fronterizas/os*, Chicanas/os, Mexicana/os, Latina/os, Hispanics, Indigenous peoples, African Americans, and "others" get together and act together for a common cause, why can't we do this in times of peace? Haven't we built the (symbolic) wall and paid for it already? What would it be like if we re-created our own inclusive narratives of the future with a paradigm of dialogue and compassion?

Notes

1 I have my "permanent address" in El Paso. Living in Juárez until 1985, I started crossing to El Paso on a daily basis at 15 years of age to train in an indoor pool all year round and at 16 to go to college, living

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in El Paso with an aunt to obtain my Texas resident status and avoid paying as a foreign national, even though I had been born in El Paso.

2 California's Proposition 187 (also known as the *Save Our State* (SOS) initiative) was a 1994 ballot referendum to establish a state-run citizenship screening system and prohibit unauthorized immigrants from using non-emergency health care, public education, and other services in the state. Voters passed the proposed law at a referendum in November 1994. The law was challenged in a legal suit and found unconstitutional by a federal district court; therefore, it is not a legal statute in the state.

3 A U.S.-centered variation of this theme is discussed by Leo Chávez (2017) in this *Handbook* as part of the "Latino Threat" narrative fostered by fears that immigration from Mexico and Latin America are creating one nation, "Amexica," that threatens whiteness within the U.S. national identity.

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